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WOMAN'S AMBITION.

WOMAN'S AMBITION.

A Tale.

BY

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WOMAN'S AMBITION.

CHAPTER I.

DUNMERE ABBEY was a place that any man might have been proud of, more particularly if, like Mr. Longueville, it had been handed down to him through a long line of ancestors, whose name had descended to him unsullied by the slightest stain or blemish.

The demesne, rich in natural beauty, had been, from generation to generation, improved according to the taste of each successive age.

When this story commences it was in the possession of a lineal descendant of Sir Ralph de Longueville, to whom the lands had been granted by the first William.

Mr. Longueville had, some seventeen years before, when a young and remarkably handsome man, married Lady Augusta Ventnor, the daughter of an earl, who could count three generations of nobility, which, being a novelty in a family who had nothing else to boast of, was consequently the more highly valued by them; and Lady Augusta fancied she had stepped from her rank by marrying one of the richest commoners in the county; a connection with whom would have been valued by the highest nobles in the land.

Lady Augusta was not without some good qualities, but they either sprang from, or were so hedged in by, pride, as to be of little account to her in her daily walk through life. She had been taught to think that people of the present day, whatever their rank might be, ought not to show any pride, although she had never been forbidden to foster that meanest of all feelings. Condescension was the form in which it most pleased her to show it, consequently she was overwhelmingly condescending when at Dunmere to her country neighbours, who had before her advent been accustomed to mix with the Longuevilles as with each other.

Having condescended to marry Mr. Longueville, she condescended to be kind to him also; but being of an overbearing temper, though politic, she frequently tried to gain, what most of the gentler sex have been accused of wishing for, power. Fortunately for both, her husband's high principles prevented his yielding to her when he believed himself to be in the right; while his chivalrous spirit, added to the true love he bore his wife, inclined him to give way to her without hesitation in trifles. It was not, therefore, a very difficult task for her to guide him where those principles were not called into question: his fine manly disposition could not even suspect his wife of *finesse;* as, with all the gallantry of his race, he believed women were to be yielded to in all that did not militate against his motto, "*L'honneur et L'honnêteté;*" particularly, as he said, poor things, they had little enjoyment in life, not being able to mix in field sports, and were always running after a parcel of children.

He had two fine boys of his own, whose heads he

patted whenever they came in his way, and took them out in the winter holidays to hunt; and at the end of that time sent them back to Eton, well supplied with pocket-money. He had not much reason to pity Lady Augusta, for all the trouble her children gave her. She certainly was proud of them, had them well-dressed because they belonged to herself, but had never been seen to fondle them, or express the slightest affection for them. They were both remarkably handsome. Gerald, the elder, was like his mother. He had her haughty upper-lip, her finely-chiseled aquiline nose, and dark flashing eyes. He also inherited her disposition so completely as to make it evident, should the interests of the mother and son ever come into collision, that the shock would be fearful!

The other boy, Monmouth, was the favourite of the tenantry. The old people shook their heads, and wished Mr. Monmouth had been the heir. Nor was this wish of theirs to be wondered at. His fine open intellectual brow, surrounded by thickly-curling nut-brown hair, his dark blue eyes, and sunny smile, bespoke him a Longueville, and his ready word of kindness endeared him to every heart.

It was a fine summer's evening in August,—rather a dull season for sportsmen, when only rabbit-shooting is practicable,—and the keeper was beginning to insinuate that, for the sake of the other game, there should be rabbits enough left for the foxes; an insinuation he always took care to make before it was at all necessary; as he well knew that repeated efforts would be required before Mr. Longueville would be induced to lay down his gun, which was almost a part of himself, until the commencement of the hunting season.

He was sitting in the drawing-room waiting for dinner, and looking over the "Sporting Calendar"; Lady Augusta was reclining on a sofa, almost sunk in the cushions. She was anything but an indolent person, but she thought it dignified and graceful to appear so. After a long silence she said,—

"Mr. Longueville, have you heard any more of those strange people you were speaking off?"

"What strange people, my dear? From Asia, Africa or America?"

"I mean those people who were about taking Roseneath."

"Oh! you mean Mrs. Egerton, do you not?"

"Yes, some such name as that; I think I never heard it before."

He looked at his wife with as much of a disapproving glance as his fine countenance ever assumed, and said, rather shortly,—

"You might have heard the name often. They have been settled at Roseneath for the last fortnight."

"Are they people I shall be obliged to visit?"

He threw down the book he had in his hand, rose and went to the window near which Lady Augusta was seated, before he replied,—

"I hope, my love, that you will not only visit Mrs. Egerton, but make her residence at Roseneath as agreeable as possible to her. She is the widow of an old friend of mine, Major Egerton."

Lady Augusta's colour rose; she fancied this speech savoured of dictation, and as she was always most tenacious of being first, she was determined not to yield to aught save entreaties. She answered,—

"Oh! I have no doubt a most respectable person, but officers often marry nobodies, picked up in their

travels, and I should like to know who the widow of your friend is."

With a slightly-sarcastic expression, he said,—

"You need not fear contamination; she was a Percival, a niece of Lord Unsmere."

"Oh! that alters the case. But is it not rather a small place for a person of fortune to take?"

Lady Augusta was rather annoyed than otherwise, to find that her condescension could not be brought to bear on her new neighbours.

"Poor thing," rejoined Mr. Longueville, "I am afraid she has but little fortune; but she is not the less to be liked for that; and I am sure, my love, you will not be the less kind to her because she cannot surround herself with all the gew-gaws of fashion."

This was just the opening for Lady Augusta, so she said,—

"Certainly not; a nobleman's niece must always command respect."

"I wish, my love, you could forget such nonsense. A woman, and a lady, ought always to be treated as such."

Dinner was opportunely announced at this moment, and with a flushed brow he offered his arm to Lady Augusta to conduct her to the dining-room.

He loved his wife, and her little-minded pride was the only fault he could ever allow himself to believe that she had—the only flaw in her disposition that ever roused him to anger. Like all persons who are haughty without strength of character, she could be frightened, and in the present instance she was not sorry to avoid the necessity for continuing the conversation.

CHAPTER II.

Roseneath was a very pretty, ornamental cottage, within the walls of Dunmere Abbey. It had been built by a maiden aunt of Mr. Longueville, who had died a few years before, and who was still lamented by her humble neighbours, who had looked to her for advice and sympathy in all their sorrows and joys.

It was generally believed that Mr. Longueville's affection for his aunt had been so great as to prevent his letting the cottage to any one; but, like many general beliefs, it was soon shown to be a mistake. He only waited until he could meet with a worthy successor, and one who would not interfere with the game. The widow of his old friend was just the person he would wish to see at home in his place; for Roseneath was so completely a part of Dunmere that the park was quite as much a part of the one as of the other. And thus there were few families to whom Mr. Longueville would have chosen to let the cottage.

Mrs. Egerton had furnished it plainly, but with such a degree of elegance as to testify that she had cultivated the taste, so useful in a woman, of having everything around her in keeping with herself—showing by all her belongings that she is a lady in feeling, as well as in name and social position.

It was with a feeling of peace and satisfaction, if not of actual happiness, that she took possession of

her pretty home, with her two little girls, to whose education she had determined completely to devote herself. The elder was very like herself, fair and gentle, with golden hair and blue eyes, and was what any one might call a pretty child; but she was often overlooked, from the extreme loveliness of her younger sister.

Agnes was a brilliant beauty, and, child as she was, she valued it much beyond its real worth. She was very high-spirited, and it required all the gentle firmness of her mother to keep the necessary command over her; but when out of Mrs. Egerton's sight, she always took the lead with her gentle sister Grace, whose yielding, confiding, unselfish nature, inclined her to give way to the stronger will of Agnes, without an idea that she could do otherwise. The children were fond of each other. Agnes was lively and good-tempered, and though she never gave up to Grace, she received more love from her than she gave in return.

The morning studies were over, and Mrs. Egerton and her daughters were sitting at work together, as the day was too warm for the children to be out of doors, when Agnes started from her seat, and clapping her hands, exclaimed,—

"Oh! mama, here is such a beautiful carriage coming up the approach!"

"I suppose," said her mother, looking at the child's face of delight, "it is Lady Augusta Longueville."

"Oh! mama," replied the child, "I wonder what she will think of me!"

"I hope," answered her mother, "if she notices you at all, she will think you a ladylike, quiet little girl."

"But, mama, my dress," said she, glancing downwards at her frock."

"You are quite as well dressed as I wish you to be, and your frock is the same as Grace's."

During this dialogue, Grace had risen, and removed the remains of some groundsel, with which Agnes had been feeding her canary, and just as she had finished her silent preparations the maid—who, like everything that surrounded Mrs. Egerton, was the perfection of neatness—announced the visitor.

Lady Augusta had not been five minutes in the room without discovering that, notwithstanding what she called Mrs. Egerton's poverty, her condescension would be of no avail there. Mrs. Egerton had such a quiet way of putting persons just in the place she wished them to keep, that Lady Augusta began equally to fear and to dislike her. The visit gave but little pleasure on either side; for Mrs. Egerton was disappointed to find her new acquaintance so unlike the ideal she had formed of her from Major Egerton's description of her husband, and she instinctively felt that Lady Augusta was a person — much as she esteemed Mr. Longueville—of whom she could never hope to make a friend. It is almost always a safe way of judging a wife, to imagine her the very reverse of her husband, and *vice versa*. Had Mrs. Egerton so reasoned, she never would have taken Roseneath, and this book never would have been written.

When the visitor was gone Mrs. Egerton was more silent than usual: she was not able to understand why she felt so very much disappointed; but before she, could settle the matter to her satisfaction, Grace said,—

"Mama, has that lady any children?"

"Yes, my love, she has two sons."

Before Grace could reply, Agnes exclaimed,—

"Oh! how delightful! I wish I had brothers, it is so stupid always playing with a girl."

Mrs. Egerton smiled, and said,—

"I am afraid you are a discontented little girl; if you had two brothers, and no sister, you would find it much more stupid; as your brothers, like the Longuevilles, would be at school nine months in the year."

"Well, mama, I should have them the other three. But I believe it is better as it is; for, you know, now I can have Grace always, and I suppose we shall have Lady Augusta's sons to play with when they come to the abbey, and they will do instead of brothers."

"I rather think not, my dear," rejoined her mother.

"I should like very much to have a brother, mama," said Grace, "but I should be very sorry to have that handsome lady for my mama.,'

"And why not, Grace?" asked Agnes. "I am sure I should be delighted to drive in that beautiful carriage, and live in that great house, which Minnie says is the wonder of the world."

"I am quite happy in this pretty cottage," said Grace. "I fancy there are no roses peeping in at the windows of that great stone house; and even if there are, I am quite sure I would rather have my own dear mama than all the grandeur in the world."

While the children were talking, Mrs. Egerton had turned to the window, scarcely knowing whether the heartless—or at least careless—speech of the one child, or the sweet gentle affection of the other, had brought the tears to her eyes. She could not speak for a few moments; and even when she had regained her self-command, she changed the subject by telling the children to get their hats for a walk, as she thought the breeze had risen.

While they were out, Mrs. Egerton came to the resolution of keeping her children quite away from the abbey, feeling that anything like an intimacy with its inmates would be injurious to both of them; but particularly to Agnes, whose rising vanity, with the apparent absence of any real depth of feeling, had begun to cause her both sorrow and anxiety.

A few days after the above-mentioned call, Mr. Longueville entered Lady Augusta's boudoir, and found her reading a note. When she had finished it, she tossed it to him across the table, saying,—

"I think this is quite intolerable; your friend Mrs. Egerton, will not come to dinner without her children."

"Well, then, ask the children; they are pretty, well-behaved little girls, and I am fond of looking at anything pretty."

He glanced at his wife and smiled.

She took the compliment to herself, but though she answered the smile, she was not pleased at the idea of having the children; for she did not wish to establish any intimacy with Mrs. Egerton.

Mr. Longueville read the note, and then said,—

"My darling, you have made a mistake. Mrs. Egerton says she always remains at home with her children. I think she shows her sense, her girls are well worth taking care of; but perhaps she may come if she can bring them with her."

Lady Augusta thought so too, and while she was considering how best she could evade compliance with her husband's wishes, he left the room, not imagining that there could be a second opinion on the subject; so there was nothing left for it but to sit down and write the invitation, which she did with a very bad grace. A couple of hours after, she received Mrs.

Egerton's answer, excusing herself on the plea that her children were too young to go into company. Lady Augusta was delighted, and Mr. Longueville was satisfied that the kindness had been offered. That day, however, she was doomed not to pass without meeting with a greater disappointment than Mrs. Egerton's acceptance of her reluctant invitation would have procured her.

The old rector of the parish had died some time before; and from the hour of his death she had made many unsuccessful attempts to induce Mr. Longueville to delegate to her the appointment of the new incumbent; but she had found that this was one of those matters in which he was determined to have his own way.

At dinner he said,—

"I think I have at last heard of a clergyman who will be a fit person to succeed good old Mr. Lyster."

"I do hope, Mr. Longueville, he will be a more agreeable one. The last rector never thought of anything but his schools and his sermons."

"And I hope the next will do the same!" answered Mr. Longueville. "My old friend Lovett, of Baliol, speaks of him in the highest terms."

"I think it would have been much better," said Lady Augusta, "to have kept the living *in commendam* for Monmouth."

"My dear, I never would hold out such an inducement to a son of mine to enter the church, and even if he were to be ordained, I should never dream of committing to a mere boy the care of six thousand souls, at an age when he ought to be a curate, and learning what at any period of life must be a difficult and responsible task."

"I think that is the greatest nonsense; I would let every one take care of themselves," said Lady Augusta. "I am sure Mr. Lyster never did me any good."

"I only wish I had given more heed to the good old man when he was in health," answered Mr. Longueville. "I can never forget him when he was dying. He had but one anxiety, that was the choice of his successor; but I believe I made him perfectly happy by telling him that I would leave it entirely to Lovett. I would have been glad if you could have been with me at his death-bed. I never was so solemnized in my life."

"Really, I cannot conceive how you can talk about such dreadful things, it makes me quite shiver!" returned his wife.

"My dear Augusta," said Mr. Longueville, "surely it is absolutely necessary to think of what must take place. I have been reflecting much on the subject since we have lost our poor old friend; and I hope I shall make a better use of Mr. Percival's ministry."

"Mr. Percival!" exclaimed Lady Augusta, with a start; "is he any relation of Mrs. Egerton's?"

"Ha! I never thought of that," said he; "I hope it may turn out to be so."

Lady Augusta sank into no very pleasant silence, and in a few minutes rose and left the room.

CHAPTER III.

TIME passed happily at Roseneath, though without variety. The children were too clever to cause Mrs. Egerton much trouble in their education. Agnes showed the most decided taste for music, which Mrs. Egerton was perfectly capable of cultivating.

The children had never been taken to the abbey, much to Agnes's annoyance, as she declared to Grace, in private, that she would give anything to have a good play with Monmouth, and she thought it very hard her mama would not allow them to go there. As to Gerald, she was sure she should not like him, he looked so proud and so disagreeable.

"It is very odd, Agnes, how you can see and know every one," said Grace.

"Never you mind," replied Agnes; "I suppose you would not use your eyes, even if I told you how; so I may spare myself the lecture your propriety would inflict upon me if I were to tell you when I contrive to look over my shoulder."

Grace laughed and said,—

"I think, Agnes, you must have eyes in the back of your head."

Her propriety, as Agnes called it, was rather too young to take fright at any one looking over their shoulder, though, had Agnes added that she was doing so when they were in church, she would have been quite shocked.

The children were just springing into girlhood. Grace was fifteen, and her sister a year younger though in mind and appearance more like a girl of sixteen.

Roseneath, though within the walls of the demesne, was not more than a mile from the village, which was close on the outside of the walls, and to which the family had access by a postern door, a key of which was given to Mrs. Egerton when she had taken the place. Lady Augusta asked her, in a most patronising manner, to visit the schools, as it might be an amusement to her to do so. It was an amusement which Lady Augusta partook of rather sparingly, driving there once a year at the instigation of her husband, who would gladly have had her take an interest in all the good that was going on around her.

Mrs. Egerton was not long in profiting by this very condescending permission, and she found it not only a source of interest, that Lady Augusta could not have understood, but also of usefulness to her own children, by enabling her to give them in a practical form that best of all teaching, letting them find that the truest pleasures arise from ministering to the happiness of others.

After her relation, Mr. Percival, had been presented to the living, she took part in everything that tended to the welfare and improvement of the poor on the estate, which comprised the whole parish.

Greatly to the astonishment of Mr. Longueville, he found, on making Mr. Percival's acquaintance, that he was but five-and-twenty, consequently of only two years' standing in the church. He was, however, a young man of the highest order of intellect, devoted from choice to the ministry, and exceedingly hand-

some, apparently unconscious of the fact. His figure was tall and commanding, his head nobly formed and well set on, his broad calm forehead sobered down the brilliancy of his eyes, which darkened almost to blackness when he was speaking on any subject that particularly interested him, and gave an intense power, almost irresistible, to all that he wished to impress on his hearers; when we add to this an oval face, a nose not quite Grecian, and a mouth and chin beautifully moulded, expressing both firmness and refinement, we may say, with truth, that few could look on Alfred Percival with indifference. He soon acquired not only the love of his parishioners, but the respect and reverence of all with whom he came in contact; the solitary exception being Lady Augusta Longueville, who, though she retained the dislike she had from the first taken to him, was just sufficiently awed by his appearance and reserve of manner to be always punctiliously civil to him; which civility he appreciated at its true value. To Mrs. Egerton he was almost like a son, and he was very soon quite at home at Roseneath. Her health did not allow of her walking so much as her daughters, and though he could not be expected to escort them, yet she was convinced that he was as watchfully careful of them as if he had been indeed their brother. Mrs. Egerton was not at all of a suspicious nature, but she knew that Agnes was fearless of any consequences, when there was amusement to be had; and that the heedlessness of her character would prevent her distinguishing, or perhaps caring to distinguish, right from wrong.

The Longueville's had grown into young men, and the slight acquaintance between the young people was not at all likely to be increased; nor would it

have given Mrs. Egerton any uneasiness had it been otherwise. But since Gerald and Monmouth had gone to college, they had been in the habit of bringing home with them a set of young companions, whose characters might be much more questionable; and she often regretted that Agnes was not like Grace, or that Grace had not more power and influence over Agnes.

One day their mother told them that she had planned a nice long walk for them. She wished them to take some jelly to a poor girl who was ill.

"You had better cross the park, my loves," said she; "that way will be much more beautiful, and safer, too, for you may be returning late."

"Mama," replied Grace, "if we meet Mr. Percival may I ask him to return with us; I have often heard of poachers in the woods, and I think I shall be afraid if the darkness should overtake us."

"I never saw such a coward as you are, Grace!" said Agnes. "Come and put on your hat before your courage altogether oozes out. I wonder you are not afraid of losing your way, or meeting the fairies, or some such pretty adventure!"

"I think you may venture, Grace," said her mother; "Agnes will take care of you."

Grace hesitated; she had other fears than those which arose from poachers. Agnes was always longing for some adventure, and Grace had an undefined dread of something, she scarcely knew what, when far from home with her. However, as she could not give her fears a name, she was obliged to yield; she was, however, determined, should she be fortunate enough to meet Mr. Percival, to ask him to walk home with them, as her mother had not forbidden her doing so.

Agnes was almost wild with spirits. Grace's apprehensions had reminded her of the possibility of meeting with something novel, and they had scarcely left the house before Agnes exclaimed,—

"How I do hope we may meet the Longuevilles when we are returning, and you will see if I won't ask them to take care of us back to the cottage. I mean to turn into a mouse for the occasion, and fancy every bush a cat."

"Agnes, you are the oddest girl I ever saw!"

"If you tell me the number of people you have seen, my dear, since we have been buried alive at Roseneath, I may perhaps appreciate your compliment," she answered.

"It has not been very great, I must confess," replied her sister; "but you will allow I have seen oddities enough before we came here. What do you say to your darling schoolfellow, Mary Vere?"

"That I never should have been up to half the fun I am, if I had not known her. The worst thing she ever did was to run away with that horrid man. Catch me marrying any one who has not at least ten thousand a year!"

A merry peal of laughter from Grace rather disconcerted Agnes, and she stopped; but as Grace's merriment continued, she became vexed, and exclaimed,—

"I cannot think what you are laughing at!"

As soon as Grace could get the use of her voice, she said,—

"I am laughing, Agnes, at the idea of a girl of fourteen talking quite seriously of being married; besides, I cannot see the absolute necessity of being married at all. I am sure I am too happy now to wish myself old enough to marry."

"Mary Vere was not as old as I am when we were at school together, and I am sure she often talked of being married."

"I often wondered, and I wonder still, Agnes, what you could see in that girl to like. I know those two years we were at school were to me most miserable."

"Oh! I only cared for the fun," replied Agnes, in a careless tone of voice.

"I hope," said Grace, after a short silence, "that we shall meet Mr. Percival. It would scarcely be pleasant to ask the Longuevilles to walk with us, they are always so distant, and they are just at an age when I should not know what to say to them."

"I am sure I would rather have them than Mr. Percival and his stupidity," retorted Agnes.

"Stupidity! Agnes!" repeated Grace. "I thought you delighted in him. I am sure when he is talking so beautifully with mama you look as if you would not lose a word for the world."

"All a mistake, my dear; I don't hear one word in ten; I am only looking at his handsome face, and it is certainly worth looking at, I must confess. I never saw such eyes; and you know I could not stare at him so if he were not talking, it would make him fancy I admired him."

Another laugh from Grace, but a less merry one, greeted this sally; it soon stopped, however, and she said very gravely,—

"I do wonder how you can talk such nonsense, Agnes; such a person as Mr. Percival would never cast a second thought on any one staring at him, particularly a child."

"I wish you would not always keep calling me a child. I am not half as much a child as yourself."

Grace walked on in silence, while Agnes, as if to prove to Grace's satisfaction that she was a mere child, ran races with the dogs.

When they reached Fanny Leigh's cottage, finding the poor girl better, Grace read and talked to her until she feared being overtaken by the twilight. Every moment she hoped for Mr. Percival's entrance; but at last they were obliged to leave without seeing him, to Agnes's great delight.

"Now, Grace," said she, "take notice, I mean to scream at the very first hat I spy, and you may echo it if you like."

"I do not think that would be the wisest thing we could do," replied Grace, "for it would only show we were afraid."

"Well, my dear," returned Agnes, "that is the very thing I mean to be, you know. I told you I meant to turn into a mouse, if it should be convenient."

"Oh, is that all?" said Grace, who thought Agnes was in jest; "in that case you must not expect me to help you; you know I never could act, even in a charade."

They went on talking and laughing till the shades of evening fell around them. There was not in reality any cause for fear. The moon had risen, and, although the west was still glowing with the rich golden light that the sun sometimes vouchsafes to leave behind him, she threw such a lovely radiance over the scenery, that Grace forgot all her fears, in her admiration of the lights and shadows cast through the trees, ever varying with the evening breeze, the freshness of which added to her enjoyment.

A whistle was heard in the distance, and Agnes caught Grace's arm, exclaiming,—

"Listen, Grace! there they are!"

"Oh!" whispered Grace, clasping her hands, "what shall we do?"

"You goose, it is only Monmouth Longueville whistling for his dog. Do you think I don't know it?"

They quickened their pace—Grace from fear, Agnes from the hope of meeting the young Longuevilles. They were descending a very steep path, when a dog rushed out of the underwood, and barked at their dogs. Agnes gave a loud scream, and then called for help as loudly as she could. Grace, who was really frightened, could not utter a sound. They heard hasty steps, and the next moment Monmouth Longueville sprang through the bushes on the pathway. He separated the dogs immediately, and then turned to the girls to apologise for his dog having caused them such an alarm. Agnes, who always took the head, said,—

"If it had been daylight we should not have been frightened; but we have been overtaken by the darkness, and every noise is terrific to us."

Monmouth was a fine, manly young fellow, with much of his father's chivalrous spirit, and his first thought was to offer his escort; which offer of course Agnes accepted, with the careless grace of three-and-twenty rather than the girlish timidity of fourteen. When they reached the bottom of the pathway they found Gerald quietly waiting for his brother, who told him of his intention. Gerald's idea was that the young ladies ought not to have been out at that hour, and that it was a great bore; but cold and haughty as he was, he was too much of a gentleman to show any dislike to the disagreeable task of accompanying them which was forced on him by Moumouth.

Agnes did not derive much pleasure from her

adventure, as she called it, for Gerald was imperturbable; she could make nothing of him, and often, in the course of the walk, she wished that she had not chosen him for her companion, when she heard the merry frank tones of Monmouth's voice, at some distance behind her, with Grace. When they parted at Roseneath gate, where Grace assured them there was nothing more to fear, the young men pursued their way home.

Monmouth said to his brother,—

"Why did you not fly to the rescue, man, when you heard those pretty girls scream?"

"Because I gave a good guess who they were, and I had no intention of being taken in to escort them, when there was no real danger."

"Danger or no danger," laughed Monmouth, "I had a very pleasant walk with that pretty golden-haired Grace."

"I certainly think you had the best of it. I must say I rather admired the quiet dignity with which she thanked and dismissed us at the gate. The other would have kept us dangling after them to the last moment."

"Agnes has glorious eyes," said Monmouth; "I wish you could have seen them as I did in the moonlight, when she was thanking me for offering to go home with them. They looked as if they had light in themselves—like two dark brilliant stars."

"Yes," replied Gerald, "that is the great defect in Agnes Egerton's character, as well as in her beauty; there is no repose, she is always at something; just a girl in whom I do not believe."

"You are a regular Turk, Gerald!" said Monmouth, "I cannot imagine what there is in such eyes to distrust."

"And you, Monmouth, are a regular Longueville; I think you have faith in all womankind, and in Ethel

Gordon in particular. By the way, if you exalt all the sex so very high, you will have no pedestal left to place her upon."

"Oh! Ethel Gordon!" repeated Monmouth, "as the old women say, she is too good to live. I never saw any one who gives me more the idea of what an angel might be. And as to the girl I may love wanting to be placed on a pedestal, I shall take her into my heart, to the exclusion of every one else, and I think that will be pedestal enough for her; and it is more than you will do for any woman, my good fellow."

"'Pon my word, a modest young gentleman. I hope your idol will be content with her single worshipper."

"She would be very little worth the worship if she were not," was Monmouth's reply to this.

After a pause Gerald said,—

"I wish my father would bring Ethel to live with us; he is her first guardian, and old Penrose would have no right to keep her if he did not allow him."

"I believe my mother does not wish to be bored with her education," returned the other; "and you know it is old Mrs. Penrose's *forte*. I heard my father say she should come home when she was eighteen."

"Yes, just in time to leave the coast clear for you, Monmouth; I shall be abroad then."

Monmouth said gravely,—

"It does not matter, Gerald; she will be free when you return, so far as I am concerned."

Gerald turned a quick glance at his brother, but the uncertain light prevented him from reading his countenance; and there was such a melancholy cadence in his voice, that Gerald felt puzzled.

After a few minutes of silence Monmouth changed the subject of conversation.

CHAPTER IV.

Ethel Gordon, alluded to by the young Longuevilles in the preceding chapter, had inherited a large property, and had been left to the joint guardianship of Mr. Longueville and Mr. Penrose, with the express condition that she should remain with Mr. and Mrs. Penrose until she was eighteen.

A stranger seeing her for the first time, in an attitude of perfect repose, would pronounce her a remarkably graceful, aristocratic-looking girl, without anything peculiarly attractive in her face; but the moment she spoke, or even appeared interested in the conversation around her, her whole countenance changed; the expression of her eyes and mouth became most lovely, and her fascinating smile disclosed a treasure of the most exquisite pearls. Nor was it possible again to lose the feeling of her loveliness. Her face and its expression were as indivisible as the swan and its shadow: once seen they could not be separated again; nor, indeed, did she give her admirers much time to make the attempt; for she was the personification of happiness, and her beautiful smile was continually shedding light and animation around her.

Three years passed, bringing in their train no greater event than Gerald's coming of age, with its consequent festivities and speechifying, which Agnes declared to be the stupidest affair that was ever got up.

"Did you think so?" answered Grace, to whom the declaration was made. "I found it delightful to see so many people enjoying themselves. The scenery of the park never looked more lovely; at night, too, it was like fairy work, between the moon and the coloured festoons of lamps; I was quite sorry to come away."

"Yes, the coming away was the worst of it, just as the dancing commenced."

"You know, Agnes, mama does not like dancing, and Mr. Percival was gone some time before we left."

"And I suppose that was the reason you were so ready to go."

Grace blushed, and said,—

"Agnes, you are always fancying people have some extraordinary reason for their actions. Is it not possible to do a thing simply because it is right?"

"Since you ask me the question, I may say I think it just possible for you to do so, but that it is not possible for me; and I fancy the rest of the world, or at least the greater part of them, are in the same predicament."

"How I wish you could be serious sometimes Agnes."

"Well, then, I will be serious, and tell you that if the *fête* at Dunmore is a good specimen of the world's pleasures, I should be inclined to cut the whole concern, and settle down into a country clergyman's wife."

"Agnes! Agnes! indeed you should not talk so; I am sure you are not in earnest now."

"Grace, Grace! I am quite serious; but you need not blush so for me, for there are other clergymen in the world besides Mr. Percival."

Grace knew well that her sister was thinking of Mr.

Percival, and she was right; for Agnes's love of a handsome face, and of admiration, had led her not only to appear as if she were listening to Mr. Percival's conversation, but really to listen to it; while he, on his part, had become ardently attached to her. Blinded by her beauty, he had contrived to delude himself into the belief that she was possessed of all those elements of character which would eventually form a noble-minded woman; and judging of her tastes and disposition through the medium of her mother's, from whom he rarely saw her separated, he fancied she would become all which he would most desire in a wife. Without being an absolute hypocrite, Agnes had an unfortunate facility in adapting herself to any one whom she wished to please; a certain fear too—which, if he had not been so handsome, would have made her shun his society—prevented her from showing, when in his presence, the worst points in her disposition.

Gerald had been abroad for some time, and Ethel Gordon had reached the age when, according to her father's will, she was to become an inmate of the Abbey.

Lady Augusta was growing anxious for Gerald's return, as she had no doubt of his success in obtaining the hand and fortune of his father's ward.

Some mothers would have preferred seeing her married to their second son, if, as in Monmouth's case, that son might be considered quite unprovided for; but Lady Augusta thought more of herself, for she was aware that, in the event of Gerald's marrying a woman without money, the least Mr. Longueville would settle on him would be five thousand a year, which, out of a rental of twenty thousand, would make

a great difference in their annual expenditure; for Mr. Longueville lived up to, though never beyond, his income.

Such being the state of affairs, her principal aim was the union of Gerald and Ethel Gordon.

She never hinted it to Mr. Longueville, for she knew he would only laugh at her, and tell her to leave the boys—as he still continued to call them—to themselves, and she might be sure two such handsome fellows would pick up nice wives some time or another.

In due time Ethel arrived, with her maid, phæton, and cream-coloured ponies.

She had need of her joyous nature, for, early left an orphan, she had been brought up by the wife of her guardian with the greatest strictness. This lady was, fortunately for Ethel—as the latter was doomed to leave her at the age of eighteen—a cold unlovable person, but of strict principles, and she had been most anxious to do her duty by her husband's ward; but not having children of her own, she perhaps overdid it. The fault, as it happened, was on the right side; for Ethel, with her happy disposition, might easily have been spoiled. As it was, she had grown into womanhood as purely unselfish as any human creature could be; and though it was not to be expected that she should feel much sorrow in parting from Mrs. Penrose, she had a great respect for her, and was most grateful to her for not sending her to school, which she had heard was the fate of most wards. She was fond of old Mr. Penrose, but she was much fonder of Mr. Longueville; so, on the whole, the change was quite to her taste, and she came ready to be pleased with everything and everybody.

The week after her arrival, she said to Lady Augusta,—

"Who were those very interesting-looking girls who sat on the other side of the church? There were three of them; though one I should take to be a much older sister, or she might even be the mother of the young ones."

"I fancy you mean the Egertons, my dear. If you like I will take you to see them, or perhaps you would prefer waiting until they have been to call on you."

"Oh, not at all," replied Ethel; "they are just the sort of people I should like to know, so the sooner we become acquainted the better."

Lady Augusta smiled. Before Ethel's arrival at the Abbey, she had determined to make it as agreeable to her as possible; and, judging from herself, she conceived that the best way would be to allow her her own way on all occasions, and yield to all her whims, one of which she supposed this fancy for the Egertons to be. Now in the blandest manner, she said,—

"Suppose you drive me over in your pony carriage. That will be unceremonious enough for you, will it not?"

"Oh, yes, that will be just the thing;" and Ethel rang for the phæton.

They were all at home at Roseneath, and it was certainly the most agreeable visit Lady Augusta had ever paid there. Nothing could freeze where Ethel was. She was delighted with the place, with Grace, with Agnes, but, above all, with Mrs. Egerton.

Her description of her afterwards to Monmouth was, that she did not think that any living creature could be in a passion in her presence.

"What a pity you do not indulge in passions," said

he; "we might send you to Roseneath to be cured. By the way, I think you must be right; Mrs. Egerton certainly has some talisman of the kind, for Agnes looks much quieter now than she used to do. I remember Gerald had such a dislike to her; he said she always overpowered him."

"I never mind a word Gerald says," she answered. "I always tell him he says those things for effect; and I know he does."

"I must defend poor Gerald," pleaded Monmouth, "I do not think Agnes Egerton is a person to be liked. I am sure you will not like her," and, with some hesitation, he added, "I feel almost inclined to hope you will not."

"Then you are inclined to hope a very uncharitable thing, and a very unreasonable one also, for she seems to me a most beautiful, animated, sweet-looking girl; and I expect that she and her sister Grace will be my greatest friends."

"Who was at Roseneath when you were there to-day?" asked Monmouth.

"Only Mrs. Egerton and her two daughters."

"So I thought," he answered. "When you have seen her in company with gentlemen you will change your opinion of Miss Agnes Egerton."

"Now, Monmouth, that is what I call very unjust. I daresay all the gentlemen of her acquaintance, yourself amongst the rest, are laying yourselves at her feet, and then you find fault—don't you?—when she looks pleased at your homage."

"She certainly is greatly admired, but I am not one of her adorers."

"Well, then, suppose I try the effect of your presence on her the next time I go there."

"I shall only be too happy to try it under your protection," said Monmouth, laughing. "I hope you will give me a seat in your phæton."

"Not at all; I have no fancy for breaking the poor little ponies' backs. It is a very nice walk."

"But will my mother approve of your taking such a long walk?" inquired Monmouth.

"Don't you put mischief into your mother's head," laughed Ethel. "Lady Augusta and I have made a tacit agreement to let each other alone; I can see it quite plainly, and I mean to profit by it."

Ethel, though she said this playfully, was quite serious in the intention she expressed; and whenever it suited her to be independent of Lady Augusta, she never hesitated in being so. One use she made of her liberty was, to establish an intimacy at Roseneath; and, notwithstanding Monmouth's warning, she was quite as ready to form a friendship with Agnes as with Grace. She allowed that Grace was more lovable, but she always defended Agnes, for she said that everyone, with the exception of Mr. Percival, was unjust to her. Agnes returned Ethel's good will by the most unwearied efforts to please her. A proceeding on her part that caused Monmouth's lip to curl with a disdain that was foreign to his nature. It is only fair to add that Monmouth always saw Agnes under disadvantageous circumstances, and that he was decidedly prejudiced against her.

CHAPTER V.

"AGNES," said Grace, "I wish you would come to the school with me."

"What a bore you do make of that school," replied Agnes; "I think it is a great pity you do not become mistress of it altogether."

"When all trades fail, as Minnie says," answered Grace, laughing, "so I may; but that will not help me at present, for I want to save myself a longer walk, by taking Mary Brown the frock for her little sister."

"I wish you would ask mama to go with you; I am so anxious to get on with this drawing. Mr. Percival says it is only because I am so idle that I do not draw as well as you do."

"You draw very well, Agnes, and you sing a thousand times better than I do."

"Yes, but——"

Whatever the "but" might have been, Agnes did not find it so easy to tell; and the two sisters blushed as deeply as if they each had a secret to conceal from the other. Grace did not wait to elicit the meaning of the "but" from Agnes. She went to her mother, as Agnes had suggested, and asked her to accompany her to the school.

The first person Grace saw on their way thither was Mr. Percival, though they did not meet him, and

she was uncertain whether Mrs. Egerton had recognized him or not. Without being quite aware of it, Grace was unwilling to speak of him, particularly as she guessed that he would call at Roseneath and spend sometime in superintending Agnes's drawing. Mr. Percival was quite an artist, and for four years had, at intervals, given both the girls instruction in drawing and painting. He had done so when they were children, from regard for Mrs. Egerton, and afterwards he had continued the lessons from the interest he felt in the sisters themselves, particularly in Agnes. He had succeeded in making Grace as good an artist as himself; but Agnes had not so great a taste for the art, and had, moreover, been very idle in her childish days, having given him trouble enough —sometimes on purpose—to weary the patience of any one less deeply interested in her than he was. Agnes grew into a woman at an age when most girls have scarcely emerged from childhood. At fifteen she was, in appearance and mind, at least three years older than Grace, who was peculiarly youthful in manner.

It was a dangerous position for Mr. Percival to be placed in, and the consequences were just what might be expected. Agnes's beauty and powers of fascination gained over him an irresistible influence, which had advanced so gradually, that it had never occurred to him to check it.

As he entered the room, Agnes exclaimed,—

"Oh, Mr. Percival! I am so glad you have come. I am in such a state about my drawing. My unfortunate lake looks as if it were hanging in the clouds, ready to fall in a deluge on my foreground."

He smiled as he sat down beside her, that fascina-

ting smile, so rarely seen by any one but herself, and which was quite lost on her at that moment, as she was contemplating her performance with a would-be melancholy air.

"Your lake is certainly rather cloudy," said he; "but if you will give me your sponge, I will throw a little more light on the subject."

"Who could believe that a sponge could be turned into a fairy wand, and create such beauty out of the daub it was a few minutes ago!" cried Agnes. "I believe it is all courage, and the next time I will use it in grand style."

"I do not think you want courage in most things, Agnes," he answered; "but the use of the sponge is not quite correct at any time, only in some cases necessity has no law. I would advise your being a little less munificent in laying on your colours at first."

"That is all very fine, but I can assure you it is much easier to give good advice than to take it."

"I am quite aware of that," he replied, again smiling; "and I have some advice to give which I hope you will not consider too difficult to act upon."

"Only you don't look in a very sermonizing mood, or I should be afraid of a lecture."

"I am half afraid you will call it one. Are you not seventeen?"

She raised her eyes to his in a sort of mock terror, which was, in truth, much more real than she would have wished him to imagine, and exclaimed,—

"It is very cruel to remind me of my misfortunes; I really was seventeen last week."

He looked grave, and said,—

"I think it is anything but a misfortune. You half

promised me that at that age you would take a class in our Sunday-school. Will you do so now?"

He bent down and gazed at her most earnestly as he waited for her answer. There was evidently more in his mind than the wish to obtain another teacher in his school. She blushed very deeply, and after a moment's consideration, she raised her large dark eyes to his, with an unusually soft expression, and said,—

"Mr. Percival, I am not good enough to teach, I want to be taught myself."

The subdued expression, so foreign to Agnes's general character, quite took Mr. Percival by surprise; and he contemplated her with a total forgetfulness of the subject which a few minutes before had occupied his whole mind. It was only again recalled, by seeing Agnes's eyes fall before his look of very evident admiration. Absorbing as his love for her was, he had very seldom allowed any decided token of it to appear; not desiring to create—or at least to awaken—in her, while yet so young, the feeling of love. This was the argument he had used to himself. How much it was unconsciously mixed with the fear of frightening her into a mental rejection of a man so much older and graver than herself, before he had gradually won her regard, I leave those to determine who may have gone through the same logical deductions on their own parts. Now, with a strong exertion of will, he brought his reason to bear on the matter, and he said, though to Agnes's ear not quite in his usual tone of voice,—

"I am afraid you are encouraging a false humility; with such a mother as you have, you could not fail, not only to have been taught, but to be better able to teach than most girls of your age. Your sister is one of the best teachers I ever met with."

"Oh! but Grace was born good, and I was not."

In spite of the grave nature of the subject, he could not forbear a smile at the pretty pettishness with which she said this; but it was instantly checked by the recollection that if she could really believe in any one being born good she would indeed be an unfit teacher, and he said,—

"Now do tell me seriously, do you not think you could teach a few little children the way to heaven?"

Agnes was just on the point of saying that she did not think she could lead any one on a road which she was not herself upon, when she stopped suddenly and blushed. He saw the blush and the hesitation, and again forgetting himself, he continued,—

"Will you try, Agnes, for my sake?"

He hung on her reply with the most intense interest, although his conscience rebuked him the next moment for holding out such a motive for right action to her, over whom he ought so sedulously to have watched. Her answer came at last, and in the softest tone of voice she said,—

"I will try."

A deep sigh escaped from both at the same moment, although arising from very different sources. Agnes from the feeling that she could not breathe without it, and Mr. Percival from a heart-felt pang of self-reproach. He rose restlessly from his chair, and walked to the window. He was fighting a hard battle with himself; but he was not a man to be easily overcome. A long pause ensued, but it was unheeded by both. Agnes was sitting where he had left her, with her hands clasped on her lap, her head drooping, whilst in thought she recalled the last half hour, drinking into her very heart the looks and tones which,

"Like snow on the sea,
Melt in the heart as instantly."

The battle over himself was gained; and, with a pale and almost stern expression of countenance, he returned to the table and stood opposite to Agnes. She was leaning back in her chair, her eyes cast down, but with an irresistible desire to see that look once more, on which she was dwelling in thought, she raised them, and encountered one so very different that she sprang from her seat in terror, exclaiming,—

"What is the matter with you? What has happened?"

Instead of answering her questions, he said, in a cold, hard tone, as if he distrusted himself,—

"I am afraid you will be annoyed, Agnes, when I tell you that I was wrong in asking you to become a teacher in the school for my sake. It was a wrong motive to place before you, and I cannot allow you to act upon it; though I feel your kindness in having yielded to my request."

His voice had become quite husky when he had concluded; but Agnes was too angry to remark it. She said, with a heightened colour,—

"It is not of the least consequence. I am not fit, as I said before, and I do not wish to have anything to do with it, or to please you either," she continued, with a glance of childish anger at him.

"Agnes, you will do me justice when you think over it. But I must go now, or——"

He stopped suddenly, and took her hand to wish her good-bye; but she snatched it from him, and shrugged her shoulders like a naughty child. He rushed from the room, actually fearful lest the delay of another second might have betrayed him.

Agnes stood in the attitude in which he had left her, until she heard the hall-door shut, when she threw herself into the chair from which she had risen, and, burying her face in the cushions, sobbed convulsively, without remembering that he would have to pass the window.

He passed and saw her; and the wish to return—implore her forgiveness and sooth her into calmness—became almost uncontrolable. The idea of that lovely, sunny countenance bathed in those tears, brought forth by his cold sternness—even though that sternness was the result of a hard-won battle over his own heart—was almost too much for human endurance. The struggle was fierce, though again the right conquered, leaving him dreadfully exhausted by the violence of his feelings—all the more violent now, from his habitual self-command and external calmness.

When he reached the Rectory, around which there hung a still, mellowed, silent beauty, as if nothing passionate could enter there, he felt as if all of earth that he had loved had slipped from his grasp. The very stillness of all around irritated him, and, much to the surprise of his old nurse, who acted in the capacity of his housekeeper, he rushed past her on the stairs and clapped the door of his room with such vehemence as to make the old dame wonder what had come to Mr. Alfred to put him in such a pet.

He knew nothing of the sensation he had created, for he had not even seen any one as he darted up the stairs. His mental vision rested on the shattered remains of his airy castle, on whose erection he had spent the day-dreams of the last two years, annihilated by his own hand. As he reviewed his words and actions during his intercourse with Agnes, he per-

ceived that he had brought on the evil he so much dreaded, by allowing her to see his love, and at the same time showing her the strength of his will in resisting its power, when it came between him and his duty. The consequences were, as he conceived, that she would for the future regard him as a stern Mentor, at the best but to be propitiated.

Far different was the effect in reality, on Agnes. Mr. Percival was just the man to draw out all that was loving in her nature. She had ever admired him, and the idea that she possessed the power of exciting him so deeply was very flattering to her vanity; moreover, she began to fear lest his will should be strong enough to break his chains, in the event of her proving unworthy of his love. Agnes scarcely reasoned on all this, but she felt it, and she longed, with an intensity that was absolutely painful, to see Mr. Percival again, and, if possible, to remove the impression which she believed her last passionate words must have left on his mind.

But day after day passed, and he came not. Even on Sunday, by a powerful effort, he forgot his own misery, and gave himself up, heart and soul, to his congregation.

Agnes thought he had never in her remembrance looked so handsome; but he did not look at her, and she left the church with the conviction that all prospect of regaining her ascendancy over him had fled. For the first few days, while hope and fear alternated in her mind, her excited manner had aroused Grace's curiosity; but there was no opening for anything like an explanation, as she never mentioned Mr. Percival's name; but when her bright colour showed signs of fading, and her buoyant step of becoming languid, her

sister was really alarmed, and not liking to frighten her mother needlessly, she took Ethel Gordon into her confidence. They were very great friends, and Grace had the most perfect reliance on Ethel's judgment. In the present instance her advice was, that Grace should ask Mrs. Egerton to take Agnes to the seaside for change of air, and amusement; "but," continued Ethel, "if your mama cannot do that, I will stir up Lady Augusta to put some life into the old Abbey. We are just like a set of old monks and nuns there, indeed, I think we are worse, for they had some merry doings at odd times."

"Merry doings," answered Grace, "never have the effect of making me merry; I am a great deal happier driving or walking with you and Agnes; but I know she is not like me in that respect."

"Neither Agnes nor I are as good as you are, Grace, and I am sure a little variety is just what she requires."

Grace laughed at the idea of her own goodness; but she agreed with Ethel that, if Agnes were not quite well, change might be of use to her.

"Did I tell you that Gerald was expected home this week?" asked Ethel; "that will help me to carry my point with Lady Augusta, in case we are driven to extremities."

"Dear Ethel," said Grace, blushing, "would it not be better to tell Lady Augusta what you wish plainly? I am sure she will do anything you desire."

"My dear piece of sincerity, that is just what I always do; but you are a darling for telling me. I would not give anything for a friend who would not scold me when I am wrong. That is the only thing that ever makes me angry with Agnes. No matter what I say, she always agrees with me."

"Yes," said Grace, the happy smile with which she had been listening to Ethel giving place to a serious expression, "Agnes is easily led by any one she likes."

"But, Grace, I don't think she likes me half so well as you do; and I have very great doubts as to the facility of her disposition. I should not care to be responsible for any of her sayings or doings, if I were the person she loved best in the world."

Grace passed over the latter part of this speech without remark, and merely answered,—

"I do not know; she always talks a great deal of you."

"I wish," exclaimed Ethel, "that she was married to Gerald; she is just the queenly creature his wife ought to be."

Grace started, and turned pale; but after a moment's silence she said,—

"I cannot wish it, Ethel. Agnes will require a better guide than he would be to her; and I do not think she could ever love him."

"Guide! nonsense; she ought to be able to guide herself; but if that is all she wants, I am sure Gerald would make at least a constant one; for he will consider his wife ought never to have a thought different from his own, and he will always be at her side lest she should make herself agreeable to some one else."

"Your picture does not promise much felicity," returned Grace, "so I am glad the distaste appears to be mutual. I like his brother much better."

A quick penetrating look from Ethel, followed by a vivid blush, told Grace that she took more interest in him than in Gerald. Intimate as the two girls were, Grace had too much delicacy to make any further observation on Monmouth; but she wished—if her suspicion were correct—that the feeling might prove

mutual, as, with Ethel's fortune, she imagined that there would not be any drawback to the attachment, and her opinion of Monmouth was so high that she thought him even worthy of being Ethel's husband.

Full of these thoughts, she walked on in silence, uninterrupted by Ethel; indeed, they both appeared to have forgotten that they were not alone. They were startled by Monmouth's springing over the paling close to them. After he had greeted Grace most cordially, he said,—

"You both looked, as I came up to you, as if you were dreaming of another world. What were you thinking of?"

They both laughed; and while Grace was thinking how she should escape telling what she was thinking of, Ethel replied,—

"It is you who are dreaming, to imagine we are going to make you our father-confessor."

He laughed, and said,—

"I am afraid I should make but a sorry one; except that I would guard your secrets very closely, if you were to trust them to my keeping."

"When we have them perhaps we may commit them to your charge; at present I feel more inclined to receive intelligence than to give it. Had the post come in when you left home?"

"No," said he, quickly, "why do you ask?"

"Only," replied Ethel, looking a little confused from the change in his manner, and turning from the deep penetrating look that he was bending on her, "that Gerald was expected next week, and I thought you might have heard what day he intended coming."

Monmouth made no reply to this; but in a few minutes he took off his cap, saying,—

"This weather is insufferably hot, I think I must be off somewhere for a cruise. The sea is the only tolerable place at this time of year."

"When did you find that out, Monmouth?" said Ethel, laughing. "I expect you will change your mind by to-morrow, for I cannot bring all my grand doings to a happy consummation without you."

"And what are all your grand things to be, Ethel?" asked he.

"You shan't hear a single thing until you promise to stay and help me," she replied.

He answered,—

"It is all the same thing where I am, so you may do what you please with me."

"Now that is what I call being a true and faithful knight. Do you remember, when I was some three or four years old, you dubbed yourself my knight? And very terrible you looked to my childish imagination, with a bulrush for a spear, and calling yourself Sir Monmouth de Longueville."

"I am afraid it is a very unmanly wish, Ethel; but I would gladly exchange my present feelings for those."

"That is all nonsense, Monmouth," said Ethel. "The present is always the happiest time with me; as old Mr. Whitby, my drawing master, was so fond of quoting to me,—when I used to insist on placing my sea on the top of my rocks, and my mountains as a crown, —'that distance lends enchantment to the view,' so I think it is only that those days have changed themselves into a myth, that you think them so fascinating."

Monmouth only smiled as he looked at her animated countenance, and then turned away with a sigh.

"I must leave you here, it is time for me to return home," said Grace.

They parted, and Ethel and Monmouth continued their way in silence; though, in general, when walking with him was the time in which she was most at her ease; but there appeared to be a cloud coming down upon their happiness. Monmouth's manner was constrained, and chilled Ethel's natural frankness.

CHAPTER VI.

GERALD appeared as anxious to prolong his absence as Ethel and Monmouth could be to have it prolonged, had they allowed themselves to wish on the subject. He had written to say that he could not return for some weeks. And it was probably in consequence of this letter that Monmouth had quite given up the cruise; the excuse for which apparent fickleness, when Ethel rallied him upon it, was, that the weather had become too cold—it being the month of April; but in his own mind he was always resolving to go somewhere, or do something, that should separate him from Ethel. He knew that she was intended by his mother for Gerald. But that knowledge would not have influenced him, had he been rich enough to prevent the possibility of Ethel's supposing that he wished to possess her fortune, when professing to seek only herself.

But resolutions of this kind, when not openly expressed to some one, are seldom acted upon. He still lingered on, wanting the firmness to leave her while she was so completely thrown upon him for the interests and amusements of every-day existence.

The weeks were quickly passing, the termination of which was to break in on the calm of all their lives. These weeks were passing with Agnes in increasing anxiety. She was completely changed, even to resisting Mrs. Egerton's wish to take her to the seaside,

which, at a former period, she would have welcomed as the acme of happiness.

Mr. Percival had called several times, but Agnes had lacked both the opportunity and the courage to speak to him: the former especially, for she could not have spoken as she had resolved to do, while Mrs. Egerton and Grace were in the room, as they did not know anything of, what she termed, the quarrel that had taken place between her and Mr. Percival. She could not, however, avoid observing that the moment he heard her voice he stopped in his conversation to listen to her; but as she had never once found him looking in the direction in which she sat, she had not been able to address him. Even when they met and parted, she never for a moment felt his eyes rest upon her face. He conversed almost exclusively with Mrs. Egerton, for whom he had a very great friendship; but his manner was so grave as to make Agnes almost fear him. Had he been trying to fix her thoughts upon him, he could not have shown a better way to do so; but in reality he was trying to tear his own away from her, believing that one so young and lovely could not be won by him. With all his attractions, he had too little vanity to be aware of them, or to think himself worthy of a woman whom his vivid imagination had decked with all the charms of heart and mind that certainly had no existence but in his own imagination.

One day, while things were in this state, Mr. Percival came to pay one of his accustomed visits. Grace was not in the room, and Agnes was sitting in one of the windows working. The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who informed her mistress that a poor woman was waiting to speak to

her. Mrs. Egerton went, as a matter of course, thinking that her place would be supplied to their visitor by Agnes.

The instant the door closed, Mr. Percival rose and walked to the opposite window from the one occupied by Agnes. She was essentially impulsive; fear for the future never cast even the shadow of a cloud over her bright horizon; and now that the moment had arrived for which she had been wishing, she did not hesitate to cross the room and stand beside Mr. Percival. He felt that she was there, but though every pulse was throbbing, he remained motionless as a statue. Moments appeared ages to Agnes's impatient spirit, and she laid her hand on his arm to attract his attention. Even then he had the self-command not to start, though every nerve trembled. He turned round,—she was not looking at him, but she said, in a low, unsteady voice,—

"Mr. Percival, I am very sorry for my rudeness to you the other day, will you forget it, and allow me to assist in the teaching of your school?"

"Dear Agnes," replied he, "it is I who should ask to be forgiven." And while he spoke he took her hand, which she was just withdrawing from his arm, in no small confusion; for the grave unbending Mr. Percival she had looked on a moment before was a totally different being from the Alfred Percival who now bent over her, with beaming eyes looking into hers, and although she felt a happiness too exquisite for thought, she did not regret her mother's return. He still held her hand as Mrs. Egerton advanced towards them, notwithstanding Agnes's attempts to withdraw it, and addressing the former, he said,—

"Agnes and I have just been making up a quarrel

of rather long standing, and she has promised to take a class in the Sunday School."

Mrs. Egerton answered, smiling,—

"I am glad you have made up your quarrel; but I hope Agnes's going to the school is not by way of a peace-offering. I should like her to have a better motive for doing what I confess I have long wished her to do of her own free will."

"We certainly quarrelled about her going to the school," continued he; "but it was my fault, and her promise just now to go there was not a necessary consequence of our making up our dispute."

Agnes escaped from the window in the greatest embarrassment, and resumed her seat and her work, in the hope that her mother might not observe it, well knowing that her real reason for offering to attend the Sunday school would not bear Mrs. Egerton's scrutinizing inspection.

Mr. Percival soon took his leave, and Agnes thought the happiness she now experienced was cheaply purchased by the weeks of misery she had endured. She was awakened from the day-dream in which she was indulging by the entrance of Ethel and Grace, who had met in their walks. Ethel was the bearer of a note from Lady Augusta to Mrs. Egerton, the delivery of which she would not trust to any one but herself, as she fancied it would require all her eloquence to persuade Mrs. Egerton to comply with the request it contained. It was an invitation for herself, Grace, and Agnes, to pass a week at the Abbey. Gerald had returned at last; and Ethel had succeeded in inducing Lady Augusta to fill the house with guests in honour of his arrival.

"My dear Ethel, my grave face would frighten all

your gay young visitors; you really must allow me to remain quietly at home," said Mrs. Egerton.

"I have not the slightest intention of allowing you any such luxury. But indeed," she added, in a coaxing tone, "you ought to come, dear Mrs. Egerton, if it were only to see all the conquests Grace and Agnes will make. I expect you will have to stand a siege at Roseneath on your return."

Mrs. Egerton smiled, and replied,—

"If they have such warlike tastes as you seem to impute to them, I think I had better keep off the field of battle, as I might rather come in the way of their victories, not having any admiration for belligerent young ladies."

"How I should like to see Sir Mark Eveleen staring at that speech, taking it quite *au pied de la lettre,* as if he expected to see us all appear next morning with pistols in our hands."

"How I do enjoy mystifying him sometimes," said Agnes.

"Indeed, Agnes," resumed Ethel, "you should have some pity on that poor man, or he will one day find out that you are turning him into ridicule; and though he is rather thick-brained, I suppose he has his feelings like other human beings."

"If you are to have him at the Abbey next week, he will be quite safe from my persecutions, as I will stay and keep mama company, and wait for some quieter time to pay you a visit."

Ethel had fixed her eyes on Agnes during this speech in the most complete astonishment, so evident as utterly to disconcert the speaker, whose colour, as she concluded, rose to a most painful degree. Even Mrs. Egerton looked at her steadily, as if she did not understand her.

"I suppose, Grace, you will desert me next," said Ethel, turning from Agnes to Grace; "and if so, I think I must retire to my bed, and leave the festivities to take care of themselves."

"I would not desert you, Ethel, if I could really be of use; but indeed a visit when you are alone would be so much pleasanter, that I hope you will allow me to put it off until then."

"I did not suppose you could be so ill-natured," was Ethel's rejoinder; "you know very well there will not be a single person at the Abbey that I care for; so I have been building on having you and Agnes. And now my whole enjoyment will be destroyed."

She looked so thoroughly disappointed, and she was such a favourite with the whole family, that at last she prevailed so far as to obtain a promise that Grace and Agnes should go, and that Mrs. Egerton would try and do without them as well as she could.

Agnes would have given anything to have remained at Roseneath with her mother; but as she could not bring forward her real reason for wishing to stay at home, she was obliged to yield with the best grace she could muster. The next day Mr. Percival came again to Roseneath. He brought a list of the children he had selected for Agnes's class, and of which he was anxious she should approve before he finally arranged it. When he introduced the subject, Mrs. Egerton said,—

"I am afraid Agnes must postpone her undertaking until the Sunday after next, as she is going to spend a week at the Abbey."

A cloud passed over Mr. Percival's expressive countenance as he listened, and he said,—

"I did not know that your daughters ever went to the Abbey."

"They never have been there; but I could not resist Ethel's earnest entreaties," answered Mrs. Egerton.

Mr. Percival was about to speak, but he suppressed the inclination, as he felt more than doubtful of the motive that was impelling him to enter a pastoral protest against Mrs. Egerton's allowing her daughters to go into such society, without the protection that her presence would afford them. Had he suggested the idea, she would immediately have recognized how unsafe it was to leave Agnes to her own guidance amongst so many strangers; but he had too lately experienced his own weakness, where she was concerned, to trust himself; so, after a few remarks on indifferent subjects, he took leave.

Those few words from him which were trembling on his lips would, if uttered at that time, have changed the whole course of his after life; but would it have been for his good? Could he have seen but half way into the future, he would have declared that it must have been so; but could he have seen to the end, he would have been of a different opinion. A quaint old author has illustrated this subject in a manner that is quite his own; he says that "the rod of Moses did not lose the form of the serpent until he caught it by the tail, when all its venom disappeared, and it became a rod again; so, if men were to catch events by the tail, they would find there was no evil in them: that is, wait with patience until the end, before forming an opinion."

This is rather an unwarrantable digression in a tale, so we must make our way back to Roseneath as quickly as possible.

The day came at last for the girls' visit to the Abbey.

A few months before it would have been hailed by Agnes as the consummation of all her wishes; now her newly-awakened interest in Mr. Percival, and her uncertainty as to his feelings towards her, absorbed all other thoughts; and the quiet Grace, having once given in her adhesion to the plan, seemed to enjoy the preparations for it much more than Agnes.

Mr. Percival called but once again before they left home. Most unfortunately he found Agnes alone, and, more unfortunately still, he met with encouragement that he had not the power to resist. Agnes confessed that she loved him, but she would not hear of his speaking to her mother on the subject, as she was certain Mrs. Egerton considered her too much of a child to allow of an engagement on her part. Lovely and fascinating as she looked when thus urging secrecy, he felt that he was doing wrong in yielding to her, and earnestly pleaded the immediate necessity there was for him to inform her mother of all that had passed between them. Agnes, however, was quite determined that he should not, and it ended by his promising to remain silent until her return from the Abbey. Just as the very singular discussion had reached this point, Mrs. Egerton entered the room. They were standing together in the window, and on her appearance they separated in some confusion.

Mrs. Egerton was not, in general, a very acute observer of such matters, but she could not avoid noticing that it was so, and it aroused a sort of hope within her that at some future time they might perhaps become attached to each other. The hope gave her pleasure, for she knew Mr. Percival was just the kind of character to which she could with thankfulness resign the guidance of her younger daughter. How-

ever, as Agnes herself had declared, she looked upon her as too much of a child for such ideas to be realized for some years; and the thought soon passed from her mind. While it lasted, she was not sorry that Agnes was going to the Abbey, as she deemed it advisable that a girl of her impulsive temperament should see something of the world before any regular engagement were to take place, lest she should be led to imagine that she loved Mr. Percival, without having had any trials by which to test her feelings for him. Mrs. Egerton witnessed the departure of the sisters for Dunmere without any uneasiness.

CHAPTER VII.

They were received with unbounded delight at the Abbey by Ethel, but, with the exception of Mr. Longueville, she was the only person who appeared to bestow a thought on their arrival. The guests comprised several commonplace young ladies and gentlemen, with the requisite number of prosy old ones, to make up the party; and Agnes, whose thoughts at least, if not her heart, had been left behind her, fancied that it would be intolerably stupid even with Ethel to enliven it.

In the course of the first evening, after all the young ladies had sung and played, until Gerald declared to Ethel that he was almost in a nervous fever, Agnes rose, at the request of Mr. Longueville, and placed herself at the instrument. While she was removing her bracelets, Gerald, who was standing by the side of Ethel's chair, said,—

"This country music is perfectly excruciating.

"All affectation, Gerald," she returned; "you must not imagine that the air of Italy is necessary to give voice or taste."

"I have no such foolish imaginings, Ethel, for I like your singing, there is no pretension in it; but I don't believe Agnes Egerton could do anything naturally."

"You will change your opinion before the end of

her first song; I would rather listen to Agnes than to almost any public singing I have ever heard."

Agnes heard this conversation, though it had been carried on at some distance from her; and she changed the Italian song she had been about to sing for a simple but beautiful ballad. She felt annoyed by Gerald's poor opinion so openly expressed, and she was determined that the evening should not pass without his changing it.

Gerald placed himself in an attitude of forced attention; and, to Ethel's great delight, he appeared to think that Agnes's singing would be more bearable than all that had gone before it.

The careless command of the instrument that she showed in the prelude and symphony, which, from a brilliant commencement, had changed into the most exquisite softness, surprised him. But when the rich full tones of her voice first stole through the room, and then filled it with a melody more entrancing than any he had ever heard before, he remained perfectly motionless, and an expression came over his countenance that made Ethel gaze at him with astonishment. When the song was ended, compliments and entreaties for another were poured in on every side, but Gerald never moved; with his eyes on the ground he seemed still to be drinking in those delicious tones. Song after song she sang, all simple ballads, until the end of the fifth, when she started from her seat, exclaiming,—

"That is the very last note I can sing, I am quite hoarse!"

Sir Mark Eveleen, who looked as if he had been fed upon cream and water all his life, and who, perhaps distrusting his pink-and-white face, fancied he should do away with the impression it was likely to produce,

by attempting to be very satirical, said, as Agnes was passing,—

"I suppose, Miss Egerton, you are like Rosa in the 'Newcomes,' you have but five songs?"

"What a very acute observer you are, Sir Mark," she observed, with a glance at Ethel; "but it is not very good-natured of you to expose my deficiencies."

Sir Mark, quite delighted at the idea of having stumbled on an acute observation, said, with a simper and a lisp,—

"I do not pretend to be a good-natured person, so you must not be surprised if my observations should sometimes be sharp."

"Oh! I am so glad you have warned me," answered she, with affected terror; "I shall be quite afraid of you, particularly when I wish to show off."

She passed on, and Gerald looked after her as if her words had awakened him from a trance, muttering, half to himself and half to Ethel,—

"That girl is intolerable. If she were but the angel her voice would lead one to suppose her, she would be irresistible."

"I never saw any one in a fairer way to think her irresistible than you are, Gerald," said Ethel; "I expect you will be sighing and dying at her feet before the week is at an end."

"Not unless some one should trip me up as she is passing by," he returned, with one of his cold smiles.

That night Agnes's mind dwelt almost as much on Gerald as on Mr. Percival, and though she drew a comparison between them much in favour of the latter, yet she fully resolved to use every means to attract Gerald, and make him change his opinion of her. His insolence, as she somewhat justly termed

his conduct towards her, inclined her to shut her eyes to the probable consequences, so far as they might regard him.

The next evening she resisted every entreaty to sing, declaring that she should only croak if she made the attempt. Gerald had all day been haunted by the tones of her voice, and had been longing for the hour when he might hope to hear them again. His disappointment, therefore, was extreme when he found that the fair songstress was obdurate; and he had recourse to Ethel, in the hope that she might induce Agnes to alter her determination. Ethel declared she would not interfere; and advised him to try his own powers of persuasion.

"I cannot bear to give her the option of refusing my request," he said, quite seriously.

A merry burst of laughter from Ethel rather disconcerted him, and he added,—

"Do you think I should have any chance of success if I were to try?"

"If a refusal should be likely to have a fatal effect, I would not advise you to make the attempt," she said, with apparent gravity; "but if there were any hope of your surviving, I think you might venture."

He rose without answering, and crossed the room to where Agnes was sitting, leaning back in a deep arm-chair. He made his request with some slight hesitation, arising from Ethel's raillery, and Agnes replied,—

"If you have any fancy to hear a few raven's notes by way of variety, I am quite ready to gratify you."

He said, with some eagerness,—

"I am sure there is no variety in your voice that would not be sweet."

Compliment number one, thought Agnes; that is

making some progress. But while this passed through her mind, she remained perfectly passive, and as if she had quite forgotten his petition.

He was puzzled, and impatient, for though she had consented to sing, she showed not the slightest intention of doing so.

He stood for a moment irresolute by her side, and then asked,—

"Do you not mean to fulfil your promise?"

"I am quite ready," replied she, without, however, attempting to rise.

It suddenly occurred to him that she expected him to attend her to the piano; and, much against his inclination, he offered her his arm. Before they reached the instrument she withdrew her's, and having chosen a song, she was just turning to Gerald, when Sir Mark Eveleen, who had believed himself to have caught a bright idea on the previous evening, and was determined to make much of it, addressed her,—

"I think, Miss Egerton, you had better begin with the last of your songs this evening, and go back to the first; it will be a novelty."

"Most judicious advice, Sir Mark," Agnes replied; "I should certainly take it, only that I am not in an English mood to-night."

His large blue eyes opened with an expression of fear, as if he were discovering that he had fallen into a mistake. A cloud crossed Ethel's sweet face, as she listened. Agnes's love of ridicule, and of making others ridiculous, had often annoyed Ethel, and that day, during their drive together, she had reasoned with her on the subject, particularly with reference to Agnes's retort on Sir Mark the evening before; for, as Ethel observed, she could more easily forgive Agnes,

if he could meet her with her own weapons. Agnes laughed and promised to be very good, if Sir Mark did not tempt her beyond human endurance; and now Ethel was sorry to discover that she had failed in shielding poor Sir Mark from the effects of his folly.

Agnes, quite heedless of the pain she might inflict on either, turned to Gerald, and said,—

"As you have drawn me into an exhibition of my croaking powers, I expect you will help me with your very best second."

As she spoke she placed on the desk an Italian duet, which, she had discovered from Monmouth, was an especial favourite of Gerald's; and running her fingers lightly over the piano, she commenced singing, before he had made up his mind whether he would join her or not.

His voice was a very fine one, and he was an excellent musician; and though he had not been left any choice in the matter, it was with a feeling almost amounting to rapture that he found his voice blending with hers.

Agnes was always natural where there was good music, and now, in the enjoyment of Gerald's singing, she quite forgot her intention of conquering him, and in so doing she gained her point more effectually than she could have achieved it by the most consummate art. Every look and tone reached his heart, and they continued singing song after song, at his earnest request, until Mr. Longueville good-naturedly said he would not allow Agnes to sing another note, for he was sure a sore throat would be the consequence of her doing so. It so happened that she was really tired, and therefore not inclined to give way to any satire, which might have awakened Gerald from his

dream of ecstasy. He remained near her for the rest of the evening; and when he had retired for the night, it was utterly impossible for him to think of anything but Agnes, her voice and her beauty. They were present in his dreams, strengthening the impression that had engravened itself so deeply, yet so suddenly, on his whole being. It was in vain that he struggled against his rising passion. He had never been accustomed to put any restriction on himself; and now that he would have taken the reins into his power, he found his passion stronger than his will. He could and did reason with himself. He recalled the slight opinion he had ever entertained of Agnes's character, which he saw no reason to alter; he could still discern all her faults; and yet he felt himself absolutely her slave, all the more that she, being quite alive to the fact, took no further trouble to attract him, although she had not the moral courage to repel his attentions. But even had she done so, though it might have eased her own conscience, it would not have answered the purpose of discouraging Gerald, who had inherited too large a share of his mother's disposition to allow anything short of an unhesitating rejection to convince him that any woman whom he might honour with his preference could refuse him.

And thus it came to pass that Agnes allowed matters to take their own course, her inclination vacillating between love and ambition, and, meanwhile, she was always ready to ride or walk with Gerald, in the afternoon; he, on his part, rarely quitting her side, or ceasing to talk, or sing with her, all the evening, somewhat regardless of the number of other guests, or of the claims they might be supposed to have on a portion of his time and his attention. Still Agnes

remained more than indifferent to him. At times, indeed, her dislike arose to such a height as to surprise herself; but notwithstanding this, the dreams of ambition floated before her imagination; and if it had not been partially repressed by her love, such as it was, for Mr. Percival, and her hastily-formed engagement to him, she would not have hesitated to sacrifice the prospect of domestic happiness to the triumph of gratified vanity, in becoming the bride of the heir of Dunmere Abbey. Thus she went on, heedless of the future, though she full well knew that, decide which way she might, the happiness of either Gerald or Mr. Percival must be sacrificed. The week had drawn to a close, and Grace had said that they could not remain longer, as their mother was alone. Even Lady Augusta condescended to ask—nay, to press—Agnes to stay, as she found her musical powers so useful in the entertainment of her company. As Grace was quite determined on not staying any longer away from home, it was at last decided that she should return without her sister. When this arrangement was made known to Mrs. Egerton, on Grace's reappearance at Roseneath, she was both annoyed and alarmed, particularly when, on questioning Grace, she heard of the constant intercourse between Gerald and Agnes. Mrs. Egerton was not one of those mothers whose sole aim and object with regard to their daughters is to see them what is called well settled. She did not like Gerald's character, and she did not think that his wife, if gifted with anything like feeling, could be a happy woman; she therefore wrote the next day to tell Agnes to return immediately, without, of course, alluding to her reasons for wishing her to do so.

Agnes was standing in one of the deeply-recessed windows of the drawing-room, just after she had received this note, in which the casual mention of Mr. Percival's name had brought back to her impulsive mind much of that strong but wayward feeling for him which she had for the last few days been trying to persuade herself did not exist. She was deep in thought, looking out on the park, with the note in her hand, and was just at that moment mentally contrasting the characters of her two lovers, quite to the advantage of Mr. Percival, when Gerald entered, and had reached her side before she was aware of his approach. A bright blush rose to her cheek when he asked her what had so engaged her. She answered,—

"I have just had a note from mama, recalling me to Roseneath, and I was thinking of it when you spoke to me."

Gerald was perhaps not vainer than the generality of his sex; yet he could not but fancy this was sufficiently encouraging. He had resolved that Agnes should become his wife, so that the prospect of her leaving so soon only hastened the declaration that he had determined should be made—and accepted. His was not that deep refined love that causes some men almost to dread the declaration of it; so he at once said,—

"Oh! you must not think of going; we cannot live without you at Dunmere."

There was not much in these words, but the look and tone which accompanied them paled the colour in Agnes's cheek, partly from anger at what she felt to be disrespect in Gerald's manner, and partly from an undefined apprehension of what might follow.

He watched her while her colour returned, and deepened, and then said,—

"At least I cannot let you go without asking you to become mine—my own Agnes."

He paused for a second. Agnes remained immovable, and almost breathless. She could not bring herself to give up all that her highest ambition had ventured to hope for, nor could she cast from her, by accepting Gerald, those feelings that she had been indulging but a few minutes before. Gerald read something of hesitation in her countenance, but he could not understand it; and, impatient for the answer which he expected to prove the confirmation of all his wishes, he put his arm round her, and added, in a low voice,—

"Rest your head but for a moment on my shoulder, dearest, and say 'yes.'"

With a pang akin to desperation, Agnes covered her face with her hands, rested them for a moment on his shoulder, and pronounced the fatal word that sealed her destiny for life. Then, as he clasped her more closely to him, as if to claim her for his own, she freed herself from his grasp with an irresistible violence, and rushed from the room by a door that was close to the window at which they were standing. She sped on as if she feared pursuit, and reaching her own room, she locked the door, and, scarcely able to repress the rising screams of agony, she buried her face in the cushions of the sofa. She would have given all she possessed to be able to recall the last quarter of an hour. She sobbed convulsively, until she had in some degree expended the intensity of the suffering, and though she had not shed a tear, she began to regain the power of self-command. It

suddenly occurred to her that perhaps Gerald might send Ethel to her, and that idea inspiring her with energy to act, she rose from the sofa, and walked to the glass to arrange her hair. For the first time the beauty of all around struck her; and the consciousness that this magnificence would one day be her own, came like a veil between her and all her better feelings. Although her hands trembled, she succeeded in arranging her hair, and then going to the window, she leaned out to catch the breeze, and wondered that she had never before so fully appreciated and admired the beauty of the park. She was startled by the large clock striking one, and ringing the bell, she desired the servant to tell Miss Gordon that she wished to speak to her. When Ethel appeared, Agnes informed her that she was obliged to return to Roseneath immediately, and asked her to drive her there in her pony phæton. Although Agnes had endeavoured to recover her composure as far as possible, she could not do it so effectually as to prevent Ethel from suspecting that some agitating event had occurred; and much she marvelled when Agnes, with some confusion, said that she would remain in her room till the phæton was at the door. Ethel, with the ready tact of her nature, merely replied that she would order it directly, and left the room for the purpose, without offering any remark on the suddenness of Agnes's resolution to leave before lunch, even without taking leave of Lady Augusta, whose very existence, in her excitement, had been forgotten by Agnes.

The drive was a rapid one, and passed almost in silence. Agnes was thankful for having escaped another meeting with Gerald; and she felt that every

step towards Roseneath was bringing her nearer to a place of refuge. She became so very much agitated when she came within sight of the house, that she begged of Ethel to let her walk the rest of the way. Ethel drew up the ponies, and, throwing her arms round Agnes, said,—

"Anything you like, dear Agnes; but you must let me see you soon. When may I drive over?"

"Any time you like, Ethel, dearest; but do not ask me to stay now."

She stepped out, and Ethel drove slowly back, thinking of the wild look of terror in Agnes's eyes as she silently pressed her hand.

In the meantime, Agnes pursued her way as fast as if she feared that her courage might fail before the approaching interview with her mother. She entered the house by a side-door, and went gently into the room in which Mrs. Egerton was sitting alone. She laid her hand quietly on her mother's shoulder. Mrs. Egerton looked up and started, more from the expression in Agnes's face than from her unexpected appearance. She exclaimed,—

"Agnes, what is the matter?"

Agnes replied, in a low tone,—

"I am engaged to Gerald Longueville."

"My child!" was all that Mrs. Egerton could utter for a few moments, during which Agnes had become as pale as marble, and pressing her hand to her eyes, added,—

"Oh! mother dear, do not look at me so! I could not help it.

"But I can help it for you, Agnes," said Mrs. Egerton. "You do not love him, and I will not allow you to sacrifice yourself. I will not give my consent."

"I have promised mama, and I will not and cannot draw back. I suppose I shall be as happy as any one else."

Both remained silent for a few minutes. A cold shudder appeared to pass through Agnes, and she exclaimed wildly, as she rushed towards the door,—

"He is coming! Oh! tell him all, mama!"

Mrs. Egerton looked after her with astonishment at the sudden change which these words implied; and prepared herself for the very unpleasant task of telling Gerald that she could not allow her daughter to marry him.

The door opened quickly, and Mr. Percival walked in unannounced. Mrs. Egerton's surprise increased, for Agnes had been standing too close to the window to make a mistake as to the identity of the person who passed it. Her emotion was so great that she did not attempt to receive Mr. Percival as a visitor. He perceived it at once, and catching some of it himself, advanced quickly to her, and asked what had occurred to distress her. The quiet, gentle Mrs. Egerton, whom he had never seen excited before, burst into tears, and sobbed,—

"Oh! Mr. Percival, I don't know what to do, and you will be as sorry as I am. Agnes is engaged to Gerald Longueville. Of all his family he is the proudest, and the most disagreeable. And the worst of all is, that I am convinced Agnes has no real regard for him."

Mr. Percival pressed his hand to his forehead, as if trying to comprehend and to realize the force and significance of those few words, whereby at one blow were annihilated the hopes which had for years formed the basis of his worldly happiness, both present and

future; and which had, from the time of his last conversation with Agnes, been regarded by him as a certainty. The effect on him was strange; he became rigid as marble.

Mrs. Egerton's tears continued to flow silently; but wishing to find some consolation in Mr. Percival's sympathy, which had never been withheld from her in the course of their long friendship, she glanced upwards at him as he stood. The colourless stony face that met her view added to her alarm, while it effectually dried her tears. Though a highly intellectual person, and clear-sighted in most things, she failed to observe in her daughters their transition from childhood to womanhood, or the impression produced on them by the every-day occurrences of life. The slight suspicion which had been roused in her mind with respect to Agnes and Mr. Percival had left no lasting traces on it. She had given up the world herself, and she had quite forgotten that her children were only just entering it. But notwithstanding her obtuseness, she could not but remember Agnes's last words to her as she left the room, and joining them to the effect her announcement had had upon Mr. Percival, the true state of the crisis burst upon her. She stood the image of despair, for she could not acquit herself of blame in all this evil that had fallen upon those she loved so dearly, though she was not aware of its full extent, for she never could have imagined Agnes's perfidy in breaking her engagement with Mr. Percival. Every endeavour to which Mrs. Egerton resorted to rouse him was unheeded by him, till at last she tried the same restoratives that she would have had recourse to had he fainted. The power of action gradually returned, and at length, without being

at all conscious of the surprise he had excited in Mrs. Egerton's mind, he rose wearily, and said he must go home. All his movements appeared mechanical, yet still he preserved a calm dignity throughout, that would have prevented Mrs. Egerton from intruding into his confidence, even had she been a person of less delicacy and feeling.

CHAPTER VIII.

We must leave Mrs. Egerton trying, though in vain, all her reasoning, and even her persuasive powers, on Agnes, and return to the Abbey.

As soon as Gerald had recovered his astonishment and vexation at Agnes's sudden flight, he repaired to the library, where he was sure of finding his father at that hour in the morning. Mr. Longueville, though a careless parent, had always been a kind one; and Gerald had more respect for him than any one in the world. It was, therefore, with no small degree of trepidation that he now entered the room in which his father was seated writing at a long library table, which nearly filled the recess in a very large bay window. Gerald advanced and stood at the opposite side of the table from his father, rather at a loss for words with which to open the colloquy. He remained standing, until Mr. Longueville raised his head, and said,—

"Well, Gerald! you look as if you wanted me. What have you got to say?"

Gerald stammered out,—

"Nothing particular—that is I—perhaps you are busy just now?"

"That is as much as to say, 'I have something very particular to say to you;' so I will lay aside my business, my dear boy, and listen as long as you like."

"Thank you, sir, but——"

A good-humoured expression of amusement spread itself over Mr. Longueville's face, as he remarked Gerald's hesitation, and he added,—

"I might imagine you were going to be married, Gerald, if I could make out a wife for you amongst any of the young ladies in the house; though I confess you looked more like a fellow going to be hanged."

"You are quite right in your conjecture, sir; I am going to be married."

Mr. Longueville instantly became serious and said,—

"Going to be married, Gerald! I hope—but who is the young lady?"

"Agnes Egerton," replied Gerald.

"My dear boy," returned Mr. Longueville, springing from his seat, "I congratulate you; she is just the girl I should have chosen for you. But are you sure she will have you?"

"She says so, sir," said Gerald, with a proud curl of his lip.

"You are a fortunate fellow," was Mr. Longueville's rejoinder.

"Are you aware that she has no fortune?" asked Gerald.

"I am fully aware that you have enough for both," answered his father; "and I hope no son of mine will ever disgrace himself by marrying pounds, shillings, and pence. I married for love myself, Gerald, and I desire to see you do the same. I am glad your choice has fallen on the daughter of my old friend, whose family in every respect is as good as your own; and most sincerely do I wish you all happiness with your lovely bride." The father took his son's hand and shook

it warmly. He added, "It is rather soon to talk of business, Gerald, but I will take care that you shall have enough to prevent your ever regretting the want of fortune in your wife."

"My dear father," said Gerald, "your kindness makes me really regret Agnes's want of money. I cannot bear that you should have to make any sacrifice for me. Agnes has not been accustomed to live expensively, and I think I shall go abroad for a few years, so that I shall not require any increase of my allowance."

"I think you are talking a great deal of nonsense, Gerald," answered his father. "Like all young fellows, you imagine your wife, as well as yourself, is to live on love; but though of course Agnes is an angel, she is not quite a goddess, and I dare say she will like pretty things as well as the most ordinary mortal. But we must adjourn the debate for the present, and tell your mother the good news."

Lady Augusta conceived it anything but good news, and if Gerald had not been so fortunate as to enjoy the protection of his father's presence when the communication was made to her, his mother would have allowed him to see and hear more of her real sentiments on the subject. But the moment Mr. Longueville told her, calling upon her, at the same time, to rejoice with him, she understood the impossibility of inducing him to look at the engagement through the medium of her eyes; and making a virtue of necessity, gracefully conceded a consent that had not even been asked for. The outward seeming was so utterly without any support from within, that she was very glad when she heard of Agnes's precipitate retreat.

Gerald felt both annoyed, and awkward, when his father said, laughingly,—

"Take care, Gerald, that you have not made a mistake; perhaps she said no, instead of yes."

Gerald thought he could give proof positive that he was not mistaken; but he remained silent, for even to himself he could not account for her leaving the house so suddenly.

At this instant Ethel entered on her return from her drive with Agnes. She was very anxious to have her suspicions confirmed, but when she was fully satisfied on that point, she found, what it is the fate of most people to discover, that the realisation of her wishes was not all which she had expected it to be.

Agnes's parting look of anguish had been sufficient to throw down the fairy castle she had been building for the last week; she could not reconcile it with her acceptance of Gerald. Ethel's mind was too pure to allow her to enter into Agnes's ambitious views; and she could scarcely have believed Agnes herself, had she assured her, that at the time she accepted Gerald's offer, both her hand and her heart had been plighted to another, and that the only feeling she entertained towards Gerald was actual dislike.

Ethel had had one selfish reason for wishing Agnes to attract Gerald, for she well knew that Monmouth, whatever his real feelings towards her might be, would never show more than a brother's love to her, so long as Gerald remained unmarried. It was most provoking to her to see that the whole family, even Monmouth himself, appeared to believe that she belonged by right to Gerald; and it was the more annoying to her because there was nothing said or done with which she could find fault. Even Gerald's attentions, though he had been constantly at her side, until Agnes had appeared on the scene, were so un-

obtrusive, and in their nature so friendly, that she never could check them, without drawing on herself the imputation of vanity. She was in the room when Mr. Longueville communicated to Monmouth the occurrences of the morning. One flash of intense delight crossed his face, but it was almost immediately clouded by some counter recollection that cast its shadow between him and happiness.

CHAPTER IX.

On the following Sunday Agnes's agitation was so great that it was no mere excuse to plead illness for her not going to church. Mrs. Egerton did not press her to go: indeed, she was very glad that there was any plausible reason for her remaining at home.

Mr. Percival was not in church, but his place was supplied by a very young man, his brother, who had arrived at the rectory that morning just in time to take the duty.

After the service, the inquiries at the rectory were general. The answer to most of them was, that Mr. Percival was not well; but to those whom the old housekeeper treated more confidentially, she declared that she did not know what had come to master; she was afraid he was very ill, for he had not eaten anything, at least, not enough to keep a bird alive, and that, she believed, was only to get rid of her; and he had not been in bed for three nights, and, worse than all, he would not see the doctor, and it was only the day before that he had allowed her to send for Mr. George; and now that he had come, she knew the doctor would be sent for immediately. The old woman was right; Mr. Percival's brother sent instantly for his medical attendant. The younger Mr. Percival might well be alarmed at the appearance of his brother, who looked as if he had had a long illness. Dr. Price was

a sensible man, who believed that the ills of the body were frequently to be traced to the mind, and as he had lived many years in the parish, and, like most of the fraternity, was rather prone to paying attention to his neighbours affairs—no doubt a very necessary part of their profession—he gave a pretty close guess at the origin of the complaint that had so suddenly struck his patient down. His advice, therefore, was, that Mr. Percival should at once remove to another climate. Either Switzerland or Germany: the latter, perhaps, would be better, as Mr. Percival knew but little of the language; and Dr. Price recommended the study of it to him, it being quite as necessary to procure a change for the mind as for the body. Moreover, he ordered him to start as early in the next week as possible. Mr. Percival appeared quite passive, which was more than either his brother or Dr. Price had expected; and everything was prepared for their departure on the following Thursday. On Wednesday evening, a little before dark, Mr. Percival left the house, and turned his steps towards Roseneath. He was determined to see Agnes once more before he left England; but why he wished to do so he did not attempt to ask himself.

A few minutes before he came within sight of the house, Gerald had quitted it. He had brought Agnes a present of a very beautiful pair of bracelets, and though he had been gone some time before she felt any inclination to reopen the case, yet, when she did so, she experienced a girlish wish to see the effect of them upon her arms; and she had just clasped one of them on, and was holding up her beautiful arm, gazing at it with admiration, when she felt, rather than heard, that she was no longer alone; she looked round, and perceived

Mr. Percival standing as far from her as the size of the room would permit.

The sudden start she gave threw down the case with the other bracelet, unheeded by her, as she remained motionless. He advanced, and, mechanically, she put out her hand to him, which lay in his for a moment unclasped, and then they dropped asunder as if nothing could ever reunite them. Perhaps the jewelled bracelet that lay at their feet between them might have raised a barrier against any warmer expression of feeling on his part; be this as it may, he now said, in a tone of the most concentrated coldness,—

"I was unwilling to leave England without seeing you, and that is the only apology I have to offer for intruding at this unseasonable hour."

Had Agnes followed the impulse of her impassioned nature, she would have burst into tears, and entreated him to forgive her; but the remembrance of all that he had to forgive restrained her, and, afraid to trust her voice, she only said, in a suppressed tone,—

"You are very kind."

He was too completely engrossed in the effort to subdue his own emotion to be at all conscious that she was suffering almost as himself. He therefore took her commonplace words as they met the ear, and, stung to the quick by their indifference, he exclaimed,—

"Agnes! Agnes! it is no wonder you can trample on your own heart's affections, when you can treat those of others with such contempt."

Agnes's conscience told her that at least the first part of this speech was truth; but it only roused her to greater anger, and she said, with heightened colour and flashing eyes,—

"Mr. Percival, you forget you have no right to use such language to me."

"No, Agnes, I do not forget that less than one short month ago you gave me the right to speak the truth to you, which you have since transferred to another, for baubles such as these," pointing to the fallen bracelet; "but I know you better than you know yourself —you never will, you never can be happy with Gerald Longueville, a man whom you despise."

Agnes was goaded to a state of the wildest passion by his reproaches; but she restrained herself, and in a tone of contempt, every word of which struck home to his heart, as if it were a dagger, she said,—

"This is, I presume, your wish—your pastoral blessing—for which I thank you; but I have no fear of its being realized. The happiness of life does not depend on sentimentality, though you may think so."

"Agnes," he retorted, and his voice changed so as to awe her into silence, "you believe you have the power to break my heart, but you shall not do so. I shall yet live to thank God that he has not cursed me by granting me my heart's sole earthly wish. I never knew you till now."

When he had ceased speaking, he stood gazing at her for a few moments, during which she felt as if his eyes were crushing her, and then, slowly turning, he quitted the room.

Agnes commanded herself until he had left the house, and then burst into an agony of tears, gradually rising into the wildest hysterics, in which state her mother found her, surrounded by the servants, on her return with Grace to the house, to which she had hastened on seeing from a distance that Mr. Percival was entering it; but notwithstanding her intense wish

to prevent the meeting she so much dreaded, she was too late, and only arrived in time to witness its effects on Agnes, and to have her carried to bed, from which she did not rise for many days after Mr. Percival's departure from England, carrying with him the most effectual cure for his long-cherished passion—a thorough contempt for its object.

Agnes remained in the seclusion of her own room very much longer than it was necessary she should. Her chief reason for doing so was the wretched state of indecision into which her mind had been thrown by her interview with Mr. Percival, and the constant debating with herself whether she ought, or ought not, to break her engagement with Gerald; for she well knew that when she should go to the altar with him, she could not swear with truth that she loved him. Mr. Percival was right when he told her she despised him. She had too long known, and in some measure estimated, the nobleness of character in her first choice not to feel the want of it in her second. She had discussed the different sides of the question within herself so often, that, like the blindfolded person sipping claret and milk alternately, she had lost all power of discriminating between them. At last, wearied by the contest within herself, she thought of bringing the judgment of the world to bear on the subject. It was not difficult to know to which side that would incline, and she experienced even a certain sense of gladness that, with the fear of that tribunal before her eyes, she should be obliged to keep her engagement with Gerald; for the sacrifice of all that she loved had already been made on the altar of her ambition, and by renouncing Gerald, she could not recall the past. Indeed, so decided had been the false

step she had made, that it would have puzzled a much sounder judgment than hers to discover any way in which she could retrieve it. Agnes had great strength of will, and once she had decided, she neither looked back nor forward; and made no opposition to Gerald's wish that the marriage should take place as soon as possible.

CHAPTER X.

THE eventful day at last arrived on which Agnes Egerton became Mrs. Gerald Longueville. She had reached the height of her ambition. And what had it done for her? She was just in that state of mind, that, had she possessed the power, she would have thrown herself at once into all the dissipation of a London season, to drown, if possible, the loud accusations of her conscience, and to prevent her looking back on all she had thrown away, to gain baubles that now appeared to her of no more intrinsic value than the bracelets which she had never opened since the unfortunate evening that they had been instrumental in causing her such misery.

It was nearly the end of the season, and Gerald's jealous disposition determined him to take his bride on a lonely tour through Switzerland. This was just the reverse of what she wished. Had she loved her husband she would most likely have exerted her will on the occasion, and have carried the day; but her conviction that she had done Gerald an injustice in marrying him without feeling even a common regard for him, and a latent idea that he suspected the truth, prevented her from making any objection to his plans, and to Switzerland accordingly they went. Gerald's love for his wife was too selfish in its nature to allow of his consulting her inclination on the occasion. He

thought he ought to be all the world to her, and he was resolved to make himself so. To effect his purpose, he ought to have married a woman who loved him. Agnes was no hypocrite, and she never tried to put on the appearance of love, or even playfulness, in her intercourse with her husband. He felt the want of it most painfully, particularly as he had heard something of the reports current in the neighbourhood respecting Agnes and Mr. Percival, from his mother, who, with all her desire to be considered aristocratic and exclusive, was not above listening to any gossip that it suited her purpose to hear. Although neither this nor any other underhand means which Lady Augusta could use had been sufficient to cause a faltering in Gerald's intentions, yet it rankled in his mind, and often induced him to impute motives of action to his wife that she never even dreamt of, for, from the moment in which she had given herself to another, she never allowed her thoughts to dwell on Mr. Percival; though the more she knew of Gerald, the more impossible it was to her to love him; and the free, frank, joyous Agnes found herself gradually becoming afraid of her husband, for whom—or rather for whose possessions—she had sacrificed all she loved best on earth. A barrier of ice appeared to be rising up between them, although it concealed a volcano in Gerald's bosom.

They passed hastily through Paris, where Agnes would fain have lingered, at least long enough to have become acquainted with a few of those enchanting scenes she had so often dreamed of in her castle-building. She could not bring herself to ask a favour of Gerald, though, had she done so, it would have tended most materially to lessen the distance between

them, which every day was increasing, and becoming more painful. He hoped that the lovely mountain scenery might have had some softening influence on her, and make her more like her former self.

Again, with his habitual selfishness, he never thought of consulting her tastes, but taking it for granted, because he was tired of Paris, and longed to be in Switzerland, that she, a young girl who had never been away from Roseneath, should feel the same, he hurried on.

They reached Geneva on one of those glorious summer evenings, when the rich sunset threw a deep crimson mantle over the snowy Alps, and Mont Blanc himself deigned to appear in all his regal splendour to the view of the travellers. The wonderful beauty of the scene awoke in Agnes all the poetry of her nature; but it did not enable her to open her heart to Gerald, who sat by her side in an agony of impatience, expecting to hear the rapturous expressions of delight which he well knew Agnes was so capable of feeling, but which he was determined not to elicit by any remarks of his own. Agnes almost forgot his existence as she gazed on the strange fascination of that changing scene, while the bright colouring died away into the cold grey; and then she fancied it an emblem of her own life, from which all the rosy tints of youth had faded as rapidly, and conscience, as usual, when she gave way to regret, whispered that she could not expect it to be otherwise; so she bent her head to shut out both the scene and, if possible, the ideas it had given birth to. When she raised her eyes again, she could not refrain from an exclamation of astonishment.

"Oh! Gerald," said she, with the thoughtlessness of a child, "the sun has risen again."

While she had been looking down, immersed in bitter thoughts, that deep, warm radiant pink had spread itself over Mont Blanc, and the snowy peaks surrounding it, which at times so inexplicably chases away the cold, grey twilight, and then again dies off into deeper shadow.

Gerald had been so vexed by her long-continued silence, that instead of meeting her remark with a good-humoured reply, he answered, rather impatiently,—

"I am sure, Agnes, you cannot think anything so childish."

The tears started to her eyes at the unkindness of his tone, and instead of looking at him, she turned to the opposite window, and waited until she could trust her voice to answer, and then in a tone which she intended should be one of indifference, but which was cold and dry, she said,—

"I never was very matter-of-fact, or very scientific either, so it is not surprising that I can only account for it like a child."

"I believe," replied he, "that science has never accounted for it, and I have never seen it but once before. It was just such an evening as this," he added, with a deep sigh.

Agnes, with the inconsistency of human nature, was not at all pleased at his looking back on other days with apparent regret, but could she have known that the sigh had been caused by herself—by her not having responded to his hopes, that such a scene would have brought her back to her natural manner—she would at least have endeavoured to be what a wife ought to be. There would be far less misunderstanding, and consequently far less unhappiness in the world,

if, in our intercourse with each other, we could lay aside acting in every form, and allow nature to speak for herself. Agnes was, and had been, acting a most unnatural part, ever since her marriage. Had she thrown aside the mantle of reserve which she was wrapping more closely about her from day to day, though it might not have helped her to love her husband, it would most probably have gained her his confidence, and in some degree restored her self-respect. But instead of this, she gave way to the feeling of annoyance caused by the sigh of a man whom she had never even wished to love, and determined to show him that she was completely careless on the subject—for the sigh had been such as to court remark from any bride. She threw herself into the corner of the carriage, resolved not to speak again, unless invited to do so by a change in Gerald. They continued their route in silence, and soon after reached Geneva, where Agnes, chilled in mind and body, took refuge in her own room, and ordered—a fire.

CHAPTER XI.

We must return to England, where we left most of the other members of our tale. From the period of Agnes's wedding, Grace and Ethel had both drooped. The ill-natured world conjectured that Miss Gordon had been disappointed by Gerald's choice of another instead of herself, and at times even Monmouth felt inclined to cavil at her evident unhappiness, little supposing that he was himself the cause of her failing spirits.

Ethel had hoped, when Gerald was so effectually out of the way, that Monmouth would have devoted himself to her as he used to do; but his brother's absence appeared to have quite the opposite effect, for he avoided her as far as was possible. Since Gerald's marriage, he was afraid of putting himself in the way of temptation, by being constantly alone with her in her walks, and rides, and, above all, in the garden, where they had been in the habit of tending her favourite flowers together; for he dared not trust himself, lest he should betray his deep impassioned love for her. He was continually resolving that he would, that he must leave Dunmere, and devote himself to some profession, or at least go abroad; yet still he lingered, fancying he was injuring only himself.

Some weeks after Agnes had left Roseneath, Grace and Ethel were walking together, as was their custom

almost daily. They both looked grave, and occupied with their own thoughts. At last Grace said,—

"I have heard from Agnes this morning."

"Oh, I am so glad!" replied Ethel. Does she write in great delight? I suppose she is in ecstasies with the glories of Switzerland?"

"No," answered Grace; "I wish I could think she was delighted with anything. She gives a beautiful description of the sunset on Mont Blanc; but her letter might have been written for a magazine, it is so utterly devoid of self, so unlike the letter of a sister."

"You cannot expect that she should write from Switzerland, and merely say that it was beautiful; and then begin to ask after Tommy Jones, and Mary Brown, and all the other Tommies and Maries of the parish."

Grace's eyes filled with tears, and without speaking she looked at Ethel, whose heart instantly smote her, and she said,—

"Dear Grace, forgive me; I have been talking just as Agnes herself would have done, which I should have been the first to condemn. There is a whole sea of sorrow in your eyes, I wish you would let me share it with you. Will you show me Agnes's letter? Perhaps I may be able to draw some comfort from it for you."

Grace gave her the letter, and Ethel found it just as Grace had said, all very beautiful, but there was no comfort to be drawn from it, for the only token of feeling in it was an under-current of the deepest dejection. Ethel was silent, and Grace said,—

"You see there is nothing cheering in it; she speaks of the sunset as if she thought her sun of life had gone down into darkness."

To Grace's great surprise and concern, Ethel burst into tears, exclaiming,—

"Oh, Grace! I wish I had never interfered. It was all selfishness on my part," she added, almost with vehemence.

Grace looked at her with perfect amazement, and said,—

"You must not think that, Ethel; there never was any one in the world less selfish than you are."

"Oh, Grace!" she answered, "you never can know how selfishly I have acted; but it has—like all that is wrong—brought its own punishment with it; and I am further from my object than I was before, though," she continued in a lower tone of voice, "most unaccountably so."

Grace waited in vain for an explanation, that she could not, or would not ask for; but she still retained her former opinion, that Ethel was accusing herself unjustly.

"Does Mr. Percival ever write to your mother, Grace?" asked Ethel, after a pause.

"Yes," answered Grace; "a letter came by the same post as Agnes's. I wish mama would show it to you. He has been in Switzerland also, and he writes so beautifully, not in the least like Agnes; he mixes his own feelings with every description. His thoughts appear to me as grand as the mountains he has been traversing, and sweet as the wild flowers."

"Does he say anything of returning home. I am sure I wish he would."

"Yes," replied Grace; "he says he feels that his duty lies in his parish, and that he shall never be happy until he is again engaged in active employment."

"I wonder much a man with such a mind could give himself up to the duties of a parish, as he did," remarked Ethel.

"Ethel, how can you wonder? To be usefully employed, and beloved as he is, I should think would be the highest ambition of such a mind as his."

"It ought to be sufficient, but it is not natural to a man to go through the same round of duties every day contentedly."

"That may be so with the generality of men, but not with Mr. Percival, whose actions are so unlike those of most others whom I have met. Besides, he has a higher motive, and you know none of us act rightly by nature, and he has been taught by the same Spirit that every Christian must receive, before duty can become a pleasure."

"You are certainly right in that; but I think Mr. Percival acted very much like other people when he fell in love with Agnes. I am sure she never could have borne the life she would have been condemned to, had she married him."

"I think she must have been happy," said Grace, in a low voice; "but it is too late to talk of that now."

"I am glad, however," resumed Ethel, "that losing her has not frightened him out of the place, for I am sure we should never have such another clergyman."

"I must leave you, Ethel, unless you are coming to the school," said Grace, and as Ethel would not accompany her, they separated.

It was with a feeling almost of annoyance that Ethel saw Monmouth approaching her soon after she had parted from Grace. He always passed on after a few minutes' conversation, and that often of the most constrained nature. This day, however, he turned

immediately and walked with her; but Ethel thought it would have been more agreeable if he had not broken through, what appeared to have grown into a rule with him, not joining her when they met in the grounds. She attempted to introduce many different subjects of conversation; but he showed not the slightest inclination to enter into any of them. At last she thought of Agnes's letter, and she said,—

"Grace has had a letter from Agnes. They are at Geneva."

"I have had one also from Gerald. It was to speak of it that I joined you just now," he answered.

"You might have spared yourself the trouble," retorted Ethel, who was so annoyed that she did not care in the least for the rudeness of her speech.

The blood rushed to Monmouth's brow, and he said,—

"Ethel, those are the first unkind words I ever heard you speak, and I am selfish enough to wish they had not been spoken to me."

"I might retort on you, Monmouth, and say you are the only person I have ever met who has provoked me; but it does not matter."

Some moments passed before Monmouth could command himself sufficiently to reply, and then he said,—

"You know, Ethel, or at least you ought to know, that nothing that the world could bestow would tempt me to annoy you; but you would forgive me my unintentional provocation if you knew the weight of wretchedness that has overpowered me for the last year."

All Ethel's anger vanished in an instant, and she exclaimed,—

"Oh! Monmouth! how could you be unhappy and

not tell me! even if I did not—even if I were not to you as a sister, I might be able to help you. Will you tell me, Monmouth?"

She turned to him, clasping her hands and looking in the most beseeching manner. Poor Monmouth could scarcely retain resolution enough not to tell her what she so beseechingly entreated of him.

His troubles would soon have melted into thin air, could he have realised how deeply he was loved, and how often he had inadvertently betrayed to her what he was now taking such pains to conceal. He answered, with a struggle that made his lip tremble,—

"I am sure I should have your sympathy, dear Ethel; but indeed you could not help me to bear the burden—no human creature could do so."

There was something in the tone of his voice, and the expression of his countenance, that effectually prevented Ethel from renewing her efforts to gain his confidence, but it did not displease her, and after a pause, she said,—

"You were going to talk to me about Gerald's letter. Will you forget that I have been naughty enough to quarrel with my first friend, and let me hear all about it?"

Her fascinating smile, which always penetrated to the very centre of Monmouth's heart, now shone upon him in all its radiance, almost taking from him the power of answering her. It was with difficulty that he recalled what had so occupied his thoughts when he had first met her. He sighed, as if to throw off that oppression that weighed him down, and said,—

"I had almost forgotten that I wanted to speak to you of poor Gerald. You are fond of Agnes, and as you know she never was a particular favourite of

mine, I do not wish to speak of her personally, as I might not be unprejudiced in doing so. But I was going to tell you how very miserable poor Gerald is, and to ask you to write to Agnes on the subject. You must know as well as every one else, that she did not care for my brother when she married him; and as a friend you might perhaps be of some use between them. It is rather too soon to quarrel before the end of the first month."

"But, Monmouth, what could I say? I am sure it would never do to tell her that Gerald has been complaining; and, you know, if I were to attempt to interfere in the matter, the whole truth would come out. I never yet could go round anything, and if I could, a letter on such a subject would be sure to be misunderstood. I am quite convinced that the modern mania for letter-writing has created and fostered more dissension than any other mania with which the world has ever been afflicted."

Monmouth could not avoid smiling at this novel critique on letter-writing, but the tone of their conversation soon brought back his gravity, and he answered to the point in question,—

"I thought you might have devised something. I am so sorry for poor Gerald."

"But what does he say, Monmouth? I cannot imagine Gerald complaining."

"That is the reason I lay such great stress on what he says, for you know his haughty spirit must be very much bowed down, to allow of his complaining, even to me. He says her coldness is not endurable. And he speaks of the agony, amounting almost to madness, of loving a wife as he loves Agnes, with the full conviction that he never can gain her affections."

"That is just like Gerald's usual injustice, and I do not half believe in Agnes's coldness; for I always thought Gerald would make a most exacting husband. I am quite sure he expects too much from Agnes; she is not a person to pretend anything she does not feel. After all, I am afraid they were not very well suited to each other."

"Then why were you so anxious that the marriage should take place?" inquired Monmouth.

The question came so abruptly that Ethel was quite startled, and for a moment it struck her that she must speak the truth. She crimsoned to the roots of her hair, and after a slight hesitation, she said,—

"Monmouth, you have your secret, and you must let me have mine. I did wish to see Gerald married, but I am now sorry that he should have chosen Agnes Egerton."

Monmouth turned very pale, and snatching her hand, grasped it with a violence that actually gave her pain, and exclaimed,—

"Oh, Ethel! Ethel! it is killing me to live thus! I must leave you."

Then dropping her hand as suddenly as he had snatched it, he rushed into the wood on the outskirts of which they were walking.

Poor Ethel stood looking after him as long as he was visible, and then, like a snow-wreath in the sun, she sank down into the long grass and sobbed as if she could have wept her heart away. Time passed unheeded, and she was only roused by the bell at the Abbey summoning the stragglers home to dress for dinner. She rose wearily, well-nigh exhausted by the violence of her emotions, and reached the house only in time to send Lady Augusta woman's usual

excuse—a headache—for her non-appearance at dinner. Her head really did ache; but even without that plea she could not have appeared, for, independently of the awkwardness of meeting Monmouth again, she dreaded doing so until she had regained her self-command, lest Monmouth should discover his power over her.

But she need not have been uneasy on this point; for he was just as anxious to avoid seeing her, after the scene that had passed between them. He wandered about till night fall, and then returned to the house with the full resolution of accepting the post of *attaché* to the Turkish ambassador, which had been offered to him a few days before, and which he had hitherto delayed accepting from the extreme pain he experienced at the idea of being thus separated from Ethel. He had so lost all self-control in his late interview with her, that he was determined not again to put himself in the way of temptation, until he had shaped out a career and made a position for himself, that might prevent her regarding him as a fortune-hunter.

When he entered the drawing-room, late in the evening, he expected, yet dreaded, to meet Ethel; but when he found that she had returned to the house too ill to leave her room, all his good intentions would have taken flight, had he not already arranged everything respecting his future prospects with his father in the dining-room, and it would have puzzled him to account for so sudden a change of mind in any way but by telling the true state of the case, which was not to be thought of. In his impatience to be off, he had directed his valet to prepare for leaving Dunmere the following morning; and now he would have given anything to stay. He asked his mother where Ethel was.

"She has a headache," replied Lady Augusta, "a very unusual thing with Ethel. It is so severe that she said she could not see even me in her room. She will not let me send for the doctor, as she declares she will be quite well in the morning. It is altogether so unlike herself, that I pressed your father to call in Dr. Price, whether she consented or not; but he says he will not have her crossed. I am sure it is a fortunate thing that he never had a daughter, or she would have been utterly spoiled."

"I hope you will be able to induce her to see Dr. Price to-morrow," said Monmouth, "unless she should have quite recovered."

"You must try and persuade her yourself, Monmouth; I think she would yield to you sooner than to any one. By the way, now that Gerald has been such a fool as to throw away his chance, I fancy you might succeed."

"I do not believe Gerald had any chance to throw away," Monmouth replied, "and I am not fortune-hunter enough to try mine. My wife shall never have to upbraid me with having married her for money."

"What romantic nonsense! I suppose you think it would be more honourable to leave her to be caught up by some real fortune-hunter than to offer yourself to her acceptance?"

Monmouth rose impatiently, and paced the room; goaded to wretchedness, but still believing himself to be in the right, and determined to act upon his conviction. After some time Lady Augusta continued,—

"I hope, Monmouth, you are beginning to repent of your romantic folly. Ethel is not a silly girl, ready to fall in love; but I think she likes you better than any

one, and as her own inheritance is so large, she can afford to marry a man of family without fortune. As to yourself, I do not see where you could find a better match."

Though Monmouth knew full well the value of such assertions from his mother, when she had an object in view, yet he could scarcely forbear turning fiercely upon her, when he heard her coolly state her belief that Ethel liked him better than any one in the world, knowing, as he did, that she had done all in her power to bring about a marriage between her and Gerald, His habitual self-control, however, came to his assistance, and he merely said,—

"Ethel is at perfect liberty to act as she pleases. I am not likely ever to have the power of putting her regard to the test. If I were to do so now I should deserve to be rejected."

Mr. Longueville came into the room just at this juncture, and Lady Augusta said no more, being aware that Mr. Longueville was not a man to enter into such schemes, and that he would highly disapprove of any speculation with regard to Ethel, for he was very tenacious of her rights as a ward, and would certainly confirm Monmouth in what she termed his romantic folly.

CHAPTER XII.

Ethel and Monmouth met the next morning, with an external calmness that is often assumed to cover deep emotion. Ethel had been indescribably hurt by Monmouth's unaccountable manner to her, for he had virtually declared by his conduct, if not in so many words, that he loved her, but that he was determined not to offer that love to her acceptance. This was not a kind of thing to be resented by a change of manner on her part, for, as she reasoned with herself, there must be some hidden cause for it, and, like a true woman as she was, she believed if she could be made acquainted with that cause, it would be sufficient to exculpate Monmouth in her eyes, therefore she determined to meet him in such a way as to preclude his having any idea of her understanding the real state of his feeling towards her. This resolution was much more easily formed than acted upon; for when she heard at breakfast of his approaching journey to town, and his subsequent residence at Constantinople, quietly discussed between Mr. Longueville and Lady Augusta, and found that he was to leave home in a few hours, though she neither fainted nor even started, yet she turned so deadly pale, that if Monmouth had had the good fortune to have glanced upwards at that moment, all his fine resolutions would have vanished, and his friend, the ambassador, might have gone to Constan-

tinople without him. But he was looking down on the table-cloth as fixedly as if he were reading his fortune in the pattern, afraid to trust himself even to join in the conversation. Neither he nor Ethel could utter a syllable; and yet when breakfast was over she lingered in the room, lest, finding herself alone, she should break down, and be unable to take leave of him with composure. The moment arrived, and they parted in silence, which might well have appeared unnatural to Monmouth, had his own feelings left him the power of reflection; for from childhood they had been fast friends, and Ethel had always been most eloquent in her regret at each previous separation; and now he was gone without one passing word, or one wish expressed that they might soon meet again. It was like a dreadful dream to her, and the first hours of real misery in her young life were passed that day in her own room. They swept like a blight across her heart, and all seemed dark around her; as it was her first sorrow, so it was her greatest, for the first stroke is always the most painful. In one respect it was fortunate for her that the blow was so stunning, as, her grief being too deep for tears, it quite escaped Lady Augusta's observation. Her extreme paleness was attributed to the illness of the day before; and not the least part of her suffering arose from the necessity for maintaining appearances, which, to a disposition like Ethel's, was little short of torture.

Time passed on, but brought no alleviation to the feeling of desolation that had crept over her. She was resolved not to give way to the grief that was becoming daily more oppressive; yet, though she struggled to keep her resolution, and succeeded in betraying no outward token of her mental suffering,

her health was fast giving way, from the continual strain on her nerves.

One day she was sitting listlessly in the window of the morning-room, looking intently on a book, which she was trying to read, when Lady Augusta, who was looking over the newspaper, exclaimed,—

"Ah! here is Sir Mark Eveleen's approaching marriage with the great heiress, Miss Leigh, who only came out last year. It is pretty plain he is not such a fool as Monmouth, who says he will never marry a woman of fortune until he shall have one of his own sufficiently large to prevent his wife from feeling or fancying that he had married her for money. Do you not think he is a great fool, Ethel?"

"I think," said Ethel, starting up with more of animation in her countenance than had visited it for some weeks, "that it is just like Monmouth's noble nature to say it, and to act upon it too."

"I very nearly quarrelled with him before he left about it. The young people of the present day do not appear to me to have common sense. I expect he will make a fool of himself, like Gerald, or remain in single blessedness all his life; for where he is to acquire a fortune sufficient to support a wife, as his wife ought to be supported, passes my comprehension."

"And if he should remain unmarried," asked Ethel, "what does it matter?"

And unable longer to bear Lady Augusta's platitudes she escaped from the room, and no sooner found herself in her own apartment, safely screened from observation, than she burst into tears, a mingled flood of joy and sorrow. Those tears had been for weeks the yearning of her nature, and now that they had come at last, they seemed to restore her to the outer world, from which

since the period of Monmouth's leaving Dunmere she had been as effectually separated as if she had never belonged to it. She now appreciated all the motives of action that had so often puzzled and grieved her in Monmouth. It was an actual feast of thought, to look back and to find the same touchstone threw light on everything that had mortified and annoyed her in her intercourse with him during the last year. After indulging in the luxury of these retrospections for some time, she came to the resolution of writing to him.

Old Mrs. Penrose complained that she never could make her comprehend the conventionalities of life, or to act in any way like other young ladies. The old lady would have been shocked, and perhaps not altogether without reason, if she could have taken a peep over Ethel's shoulder as she placed herself at her writing table and commenced.

"My dear Knight,—"

"Oh! that will never do," she said to herself; "after that beginning he would expect to see me sign myself his lady-love; and besides, it is not natural."

She took another sheet of paper, and tried again.

"My dear Monmouth,—

"It is pretty plain that you never had a real sister, or you would not have had the heart to leave your adopted one dying of curiosity, for the last six weeks, to know all about Stamboul—and yourself. If you do not send me a little of the sunshine in which you are disporting, to awaken the Abbey from the state of somnambulism into which it has fallen since you disappeared, I think we shall have to vacate in favour of the bats and the owls. I actually met one in the corridor

last night,—at least it was either a bat or a ghost, and you know both denote a great want of life. I was magnanimous enough not to scream, knowing there would not have been any one to come to the rescue. A very bad account has been received of dear Agnes. She has been seriously ill at the Great St. Bernard, and was moved to D'Aoste. Poor dear Agnes, I cannot bear to think of her future life! Mr. Percival has returned, looking more like an angel than anything human: I expect to see him fly off some of these fine days. Rosa Leigh is going to be married to Sir Mark Eveleen. Could you imagine such a thing? She appeared such a nice girl, and he is such a silly specimen of poor humanity. Lady Augusta is so immersed in her various correspondences, that I am in danger of losing the use of my tongue, particularly as Grace has lost the use of hers. We often walk for an hour together without exchanging three ideas. After this description of the *locale* you may fancy I should turn into a statue, if it were not for your father. He is the only spark of real life in the place. He bewails your absence very much, which affronts my presence very much; but I mean to become a better girl for the future, and cheer up the dear old guardian—if he will let me. How I should like to read this tissue of nonsense to Mrs. Penrose, and sit listening demurely to the scolding I should receive. Do you know, there are some cases in which a good scolding is a most satisfactory affair! It shows that people take some interest in one, for I rather fancy scolding is not a very pleasant employment. My sayings and doings used so to horrify the dear old lady, that she gave me scoldings enough to last for my life. Having told you all the news, and much more than you deserve, I must say

good-bye, wishing you all sorts of Eastern adventures.

"Your affectionate friend,

"ETHEL GORDON."

After Ethel had finished this epistle, she appeared to have become her own joyous self again. The sunshine of her mind was cast on all around, and everything wore a smiling aspect. The task which she had imposed on herself of becoming companionable to Mr. Longueville was an easy one now that the weight that had so oppressed and changed her had been completely removed, as if by magic. Again the old Abbey was enlivened by her joyous step and her sweet voice. Her guardian wondered at the transformation, but he came at last to the conclusion that her temporary inertness must have arisen from ill health.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE first morning in which Agnes saw the sun reflected on Lake Leman was to her anything but a joyous one. Had she been told twelve months before, that she should have been there as Gerald Longueville's bride, she would have thought that nothing could have been wanting to her happiness. Now that unlooked-for, that visionary state of things, had actually come to pass, and had brought her such misery as she could not have conceived it possible to experience with such sources of pleasure within her reach. Unhappily for Agnes, she had not learned to feel before the last few months, and she did not know the strength of those feelings which had lain dormant in her breast until it was too late. Her present wretchedness did not arise so much from her love for Mr. Percival as from her dislike to Gerald, and from the nervous excitement brought on by the continual struggle against the indulgence in any thought unbecoming his wife. She longed to lay her head on her mother's shoulder, and tell her all her difficulties. But even if she had been at home, she could not have done so; for she had married against the express wish—nay, even against the entreaties of Mrs. Egerton, and her personal spirit was still too unbroken to allow of her confessing to any one save herself that she was so soon reaping the fruits of her evil-doing. Gerald had left her undis-

turbed to her own reflections the evening before, while he was pouring forth his complaints to Monmouth; and though at first she felt disposed to give herself to despair; yet after a while her natural good sense came to her assistance, and led her to the mental acknowledgment, that if she had done wrong in marrying Gerald, she would do still worse in making him miserable, as she was herself; and therefore, if she could not love him, she would at least endeavour to enact the part of a good wife. This last resolution was an effort to silence her conscience, which always called out most loudly in her despairing moments. The impression had not worn off by the next morning, so, notwithstanding a severe throbbing headache, she would not indulge herself by remaining in bed, but made her appearance at the usual hour, with such a determination, if possible, to please her husband, that Gerald forgot all the lamentations with which he had filled his letter the previous evening, in the sunlight of Agnes's smiles. While they were at breakfast the mist came sweeping across the lake, swallowing up vale and mountain. Agnes looked at it with dismay, believing that she never could keep up the resolution of playing the agreeable wife if they were deprived of an excursion of some kind, she cared not what. While these thoughts were passing through her mind, the guide who had been engaged to attend them called to say that it was just the weather for ascending the mountains, where all would be bright and clear, although only fog was to be seen in the valley. If the lady could drive four miles, to the foot of the Grand Saline, and then walk up the mountain out of the mist, they might spend the day in unclouded sunshine, and see one of the most beautiful effects of mountain scenery.

This was just what Agnes wished. There was something to be done, which, from the excitement and fatigue attending it, would take her out of herself, and prevent her thinking, which was anything but an agreeable employment to her.

It was certainly fatiguing enough as they toiled up the rocks, scarcely seeing more of the ground than where they placed their feet. When on passing the last village they were still wrapped in obscurity, Gerald became so much afraid that Agnes might overtire herself that he proposed returning, but she would not hear of doing so. She took a gloomy pleasure in looking upon the mist that lowered around her, falling in large drops from her dress and hanging heavily upon her hair, like pearls upon ebony. They had abandoned all idea of being able to reach the sunlight, which appeared to them as if it had receded heavenward as they ascended, when suddenly there heads emerged from the cloud of mist. The deep blue sky spread around them like a curtain, and the sun flashed back from Mount Blanc, and from all the sunny peaks of the glaciers, with a brilliancy almost too glorious to be gazed at, if the eye had not been relieved by the wooded tops of the Jura range, which lay in the mist like verdant islands in a tideless ocean.

"What are you thinking of, Agnes," asked Gerald. "Is the glory too great for utterance?"

Agnes raised her lovely dark eyes, which looked more exquisitely beautiful than they had ever appeared before, as if they had drank in some of the pure light spread around them, and answered,—

"I was thinking, if happiness ever came to the heart as suddenly as this brilliant scene just now broke upon our view, would it give the same feeling of oppression.

This answer, most unintentionally on Agnes's part struck a chill to Gerald's heart; he felt that his idol was unhappy, and that he had not the power of removing one sorrow from her heart, one cloud from her brow. With deep disappointment in his voice, he said,—

"Then you do not like this radiant scene?"

"Perhaps it is too bright for me, I would rather stand on the verge of this crag, and listen to the sounds of human life rising up out of the mist. It is not so fearfully grand."

She drew nearer him as she spoke, and when he took her hand, and found it cold and trembling in his his annoyance—his wounded feelings passed away in a moment, and sorely he accused himself of want of care and consideration in having allowed her to undergo such excitement and fatigue. He took off his cloak, and spreading it on a rock, placed her on it, in a position in which she could see as little of the glorious scenery that surrounded her as possible. He tried to think that it must be the magnitude of all that met her gaze which had overcome her, and that by degrees she might become accustomed to it, even sufficiently to enjoy it. But Agnes would rather have shut her eyes on all the wondrous creation that lay before her, if she could at the same time have shut out recollection. Little as she liked Gerald's attentions, she could not but feel grateful to him for his present gentle kindness, as he chaffed her hands in his, and lamented his selfish carelessness of his treasure, in suffering her to come so far. He blamed himself so immeasurably, that Agnes, much to her own surprise, found herself defending him, and would on no account hear of their descending the mountain before sunset, as he would

have done in his terror lest a longer stay in that highly rarified air might injure her. But she was determined not to allow him to lose the pleasure of witnessing the sunset on the mist. He could not make her confess how gladly she would have returned to their hotel, nor yield to his entreaties to do so. The wind rose towards the evening, and as the deep red light played upon the surging billows of the mist, they rolled like waves of living fire. Even Agnes was awakened to something like enthusiasm, as she gazed upon the richness and novelty of the strange scene. It was with regret that she again felt herself enveloped in the dark clouds, and descended the mountain. With all its drawbacks, it had been to Gerald the happiest day of his married life. Agnes had permitted his attentions, she had even smiled upon them, instead of turning away with scarcely concealed abhorence, as she had so often done before, almost driving him to distraction. It was with a kind of superstitious feeling that he entered that thick mist, as if the cold grey atmosphere would bring back to Agnes the iciness of manner that had so often chilled him. Fortunately for both, the path was sufficiently dangerous to banish the contemplation of any but external objects, and Agnes was glad to accept the assistance that Gerald was but too ready to offer. It was late when they reached their hotel, and it was their last evening in Geneva. They left the next morning for Chamouni, to form a nearer acquaintance with Mount Blanc. Agnes hoped that Gerald might meet some of his friends there, or any one, or anything that could lessen the continual strain imposed upon her by the long solitary days with him. She was, however, doomed to disappointment, for there were but few English

there, and not any of them on the list of Gerald's acquaintance; so she had to bear the *tête-à-tête* excursions to the Mer de Glace, the Cascade des Pelerines, etc., etc., unvaried and unrelieved by any other companionship than that of the newly-married husband of her choice. When all the excursions were exhausted, Gerald asked her if she thought she was equal to the tour of Mount Blanc.

"Oh! Gerald," she cried, "I never could go to the top of Mont Blanc."

He laughed, and said,—

"I do not want you to turn into a heroine, Agnes; I only wish to take you across the grand St. Bernard, up the Val d'Aoste, and round through a world of beauty."

Agnes had little natural taste for the sublime, and for the beautiful only when it was exhibited in the human face. Gerald's proposal sent a cold chill through her frame; but, according to her resolution of being a good wife, she would not offer any objection; and she declared herself strong enough for anything.

The journey proved a most fatiguing one. They left their carriages at St. Pierre, and mounted mules. Agnes was sadly exhausted; however, she thought it better to press on to the *Hospice* of St. Bernard. Gerald wished her to rest at the *Auberge*, which was about two hours beyond St. Pierre; but she had become so feverish and excited by the highly rarified air that she could not be persuaded to stop, even for half an hour. Before they reached the Hospice, Gerald was obliged to walk beside her mule, to support her, and just as they arrived—as if the necessity for exertion had given her strength until then—she fell fainting into his arms. Bitterly he repented of his efforts to instil into her his love of the magnificent

scenery they had been passing through; and he blamed himself, as he hung over her senseless form, for his want of consideration and selfish thoughtlessness. Fortunately there was an English physician in the *Hospice*, who remained three days for the purpose of attending upon Agnes.

At the end of that time he told Gerald that the severe air of the mountains did not agree with her, and that he ought to take her down into the valley again as soon as she could travel; and if he wished her to recover her tone of mind, it would be expedient for her to visit Paris, and enter into society there, or perhaps London would be as good; but in some way change, constant change, was necessary for her.

All this was very distasteful to Gerald; but he was too much alarmed at Agnes's illness to demur, and he resolved to return as soon as she could bear the journey. He was so very kind and tender in his manner, and so attentive to all her wishes, that she felt it less difficult to perform her self-imposed task.

The first day that she was able to rise and sit by the fire, warmly wrapped in furs, Gerald brought her the visitors' book, in the hope that she might find some source of amusement in the observations it contained. She opened it listlessly, not expecting, from her limited circle of friends, to see any name with which she was acquainted. She was beginning to be interested in odd remarks, when, on turning a leaf, she was confronted by a handwriting with which she was only too familiar, to be able to bear its sudden appearance, with all its associations of happiness and misery. It was Mr. Percival's. He had transcribed a part of Coleridge's "Hymn before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni."

The colour rose to her temples, and she turned the page without reading what he had written. Gerald remarked her change of countenance, and his quick eye marked the page for future inspection. Quickly as the writing banished from her sight, the colour faded from her cheek. She became colder, and paler, until, feeling that she was about to faint, she stretched out her arms to Gerald; but before he could start forward to support her, she had fallen from her chair to the ground. The doctor, who was instantly summoned, was sorely puzzled to account for this unexpected seizure, as he had pronounced her so very much better an hour before; and he now advised Gerald to have her removed from the *Hospice* as soon as possible, even if it were necessary to use a litter for the purpose. Gerald told him that he thought her faintness proceeded from something she had seen in the visitors' book. His dark look, as he said this, did not escape the observant eye of the doctor, and he said,—

"Ha! that is strange, and shows a great debility. Do you happen to know what it was? perhaps you are mistaken?"

"I am almost sure I am not mistaken," answered Gerald, "though I did not happen to be near Mrs. Longueville at the moment."

"I will take care," thought the doctor, "that you shall never make yourself quite sure on the subject."

Agnes's youth and extreme beauty, joined to her fascinating manner, had quite interested him in her welfare; whilst, on the other hand, Gerald's haughty demeanour and dark unprepossessing countenance had repelled him. He was a cool, quiet, observing man, and having no romance of his own on hand—persons of that kind are not supposed to know what romance

is—he had constructed a very pretty little one on their account, in which Gerald and Agnes figured as hero and heroine, and in his wandering fancies had approached the truth rather too closely not to imagine that Agnes's happiness would be materially endangered if Gerald were to become cognizant of the name, or the handwriting, that had wrought such unpleasant effects on his wife. Therefore he had no sooner left Agnes's apartment than he repaired to the general sitting-room, and quietly took the visitors' book into his own, determined that Gerald should not have the opportunity of gratifying his jealous curiosity. Now, we do not say that this was quite right of the doctor, for there must be something wrong when married ladies faint on seeing the handwriting of an old lover. But doctors take a great interest in the welfare of their patients, and Dr. Green might have thought Agnes was not strong enough to bear a scene with an infuriated husband. It was fortunate for her that she had awakened so much interest in her physician; for though Gerald's jealous fears were excited, the precautionary measures adopted by Dr. Green precluded the possibility of his more than guessing the exciting cause, and thus the power was still left to Agnes to work her way—so far as the lot she had chosen would permit—to happiness. She was now quite as anxious to leave the *Hospice* as the doctor could desire, and she longed with an increasing yearning to leave Switzerland, with all its bitter associations, behind her, vainly hoping to silence her conscience and bury her deep regret in the busy haunts of men. Very ungracefully did Gerald yield to the recommendation of Dr. Green to take her to Paris. But he did yield —and so ended their bridal tour in Switzerland.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ethel did not overestimate the amount of happiness that her letter would confer upon Monmouth. But he had overestimated his strength when he had resolved to separate himself so completely from her, and placed it out of his power even to hear of her. Had Lady Augusta been of a different nature, or had she possessed any real affection for either himself or Ethel, he might have hoped that she would have been the medium of communication between them; but her letters consisted chiefly of the political and fashionable news of the day, and of complaints of the number and exigency of her correspondents. Ethel's name was never mentioned; and it was always with a sense of desolation that he finished Lady Augusta's elaborate compositions. But we must let his answer to Ethel's letter speak for him.

"My Dearest Ethel,—

"The day on which your letter reached this, I had left the house early in the morning, quite unconscious of the blessing which I was about to deprive myself of for so many hours. That day was one of the gloomiest of my life. Wearied with sight-seeing, in which I took no interest, I determined to pass over to the Asiatic side of the sea of Marmora, and visit Scutari. It was one of those oppressively fine days, that appeared to give joy to all but myself, and I

thought that when I reached the grove of cypress, which waves far and wide over the tombs of the dead, I should find rest from the outward world; but I forgot I was in Turkey, where the gayest of all gay scenes are the cemeteries, and where the people seem to me to resort for the purpose of forgetting the invisible world, and all its inhabitants, instead of mourning over the loss of those who have passed away.

"On first landing, I had a glorious view of Mount Olympus. I longed for wings to fly to it and bathe my burning brow in its cooling snows. But if I go on much longer in this strain you will think I have had a *coup-de-soleil*. If, however, I even could have made myself wings, not all the snows of Olympus could have refreshed me as your letter did. And when I discovered how long it had rested on my table in my absence unread, I regretted the hours of lost happiness that my ramble had stolen from me; and I could not but feel that if I had had such a talisman with me I should have been in better humour with the people, as well as with the scenery. I am afraid I shall not have any Eastern adventures to relate. They are only to be found by those who seek them, and who have not such a home-sick imagination as I am most unfortunately possessed of. I do not admire the Turkish ladies. They have fine eyes, but they make too much use of them; and there is nothing refreshing in their expression. Their *yashmacs* are but slight veils, and I suspect, where there is a pretty face, its possessor contrives to let it be seen; indeed, some of the *yashmacs* are quite transparent. I am sorry I cannot tell you anything more of the ladies, as I only meet them in the streets. If you wish to make their acquaintance you must come

out, as I cannot do it for you. Your account of Agnes is not very cheering. I am afraid poor Gerald has but a small chance of happiness. His letters have been rather more cheerful lately. He evidently loves his wife as much as ever; but though I sometimes think there is a dawning of happiness rising on his spirit, the next letter destroys the illusion, and shows that he is as wretched as ever. I had a letter from Lord Comdon yesterday, asking me to go with him to Paris as *attaché*, when I become tired of this place. I am quite tired of it already, so I will accept his offer. Paris is so near home, that it will not be such banishment from all that I love. I hope you do not feel any inclination to wing your way to heaven with the angel you describe in such glowing colours. What has happened to Grace? I am afraid you will be quite shocked at my expressing such an idea, but I should not be much surprised if she were to clip your angel's wings, and chain him down to earth again. Agnes is not a woman for whom a man would die. And now what am I to say to gain your forgiveness after this assertion? I must only throw myself on the mercy of my sweet sister, and beg of her not to show her displeasure by silence. Your letter has given me more happiness than I can dare to express, and I should be miserable were I to lose the hope of another. I do not think that even old Mrs. Penrose would object to your writing to me, for you may remember she gave you over into my charge on all occasions. I long for home more than I ever did in my school days, but, present or absent,

"Believe me always your devoted friend,

"M. LONGUEVILLE."

Monmouth fancied he might write anything when he had, with a great deal of difficulty, brought himself to call Ethel his sister. Before writing the word he had held his pen suspended, then dashing it on the table, he snatched up her letter and, pressing it to his lips and to his burning forehead, leaned his face on his hands in deep thought. His conscience told him that he ought to rejoice, if she did indeed regard him as a brother; and that if he could not offer her a home in his heart, he ought to leave her fancy free, and even accustom himself to the idea that she would one day belong to another. This was all much easier to say than to feel, or to act upon, and pushing back his chair, he rose and paced the room for half an hour, at the end of which time he found himself just in the position in which so many men discover themselves to be, standing on the edge of a precipice from which they do not wish to draw back. He sat down again to his letter, determined to let things take their course; and, in the meanwhile the only chance he had of maintaining a regular correspondence with her was to accept the relationship she had assigned him in her letter, and call her his sister.

Ethel had counted the days she would have to wait for Monmouth's reply: nor was she disappointed in her reckoning, for he answered it without the delay of a single post. Neither did the letter itself disappoint her. She smiled for a moment at the little jealous fear that peeped out about Mr. Percival, and the next she was angry with herself for the smile.

"Dear Monmouth," she thought, "I would not make him jealous of anything. He has enough to annoy him without that. If he would only stay at home, we should be as happy as the summer day is long.

It is not necessary that he should marry any one, and if Lady Augusta had let him alone, he never would have dreamed of doing so." But here she paused in her meditations, and recalled all the strange things he had said and done for the last year; and then ended by wondering why he could not be as happy with her as she could be with him, if he would only come back. She rose to shake off these reflections, that puzzled her so much, and said aloud,—

"I would not look into the future, even if I could, for I know it will all come right in the end,"

She went to Roseneath to ask Grace to come for a walk, as she fancied her pale cheeks were owing to her remaining so much indoors with Mrs. Egerton, and Ethel feared she had been selfish in her sorrow, and had in a great measure neglected Grace while her mind had been so preoccupied. As she was on her way it occurred to her, how easy it is to be unselfish when one is happy.

"I am afraid poor Grace has some secret grief. Being shut in from fresh air might make her palid, but could not produce that air of deep dejection, and make her look sometimes as if she longed to throw herself into my arms and cry. I wish she would; I am sure I have never had that wretched feeling since I had a good cry." Altogether Ethel was puzzled; but she knew she could not question Grace, as she would not like to be questioned herself, so she was obliged to trust to chance for the power of comforting her friend whom she loved so dearly.

When she reached Roseneath she found Mr. Percival there, and though paler and thinner, he was otherwise much the same as she had ever seen him. There was no mention of Agnes, and Ethel was afraid to inquire

in Mr. Percival's presence if there had been letters received from her, or from Gerald. When Mr. Percival went away, Ethel asked Grace to walk with her. It was a lovely day, and the two friends were more inclined to enjoy it and each other's society than they had been for a long time. Ethel said,—

"I like these grey soft days, though I am so happy just now I think I could bear a little more sunshine without shutting my eyes."

Grace laughed her clear low laugh, which reminded Ethel of the happy days when they first became friends. She laughed too, in the joyousness of her heart, and said,—

"I presume, Grace, you are laughing at me, and though I do not understand the jest, I think I am privileged to join in your merriment."

"I ought to beg your pardon for laughing, Ethel, but indeed, I could not help it just now; you so often exclaim against romance, and yet you say such romantic things."

"I believe, Grace, you are right, and I ought to exclaim against sentimentality rather than romance; I always fancy sentimental young ladies are the essence of affectation, and romance may be perfectly natural. For instance, I think you are romantic, and I am sure you are not affected."

"I wish," answered Grace, "that I was more matter-of-fact. Matter-of-fact people go through the world much more quietly than those who have quicker perceptions of the beautiful and sorrowful in everything."

"Of all my acquaintances I should have supposed, Grace, that you would pass through the world the most quietly; except Gerald's carrying off Agnes from us, I do not know of any excitement you have had to

break the extreme quietude of your life since I have known you."

Grace blushed deeply, as she said,—

"I think, Ethel, the mind may become disquieted without much to affect it from without. That is the reason I fancy matter-of-fact people have such an advantage, because they are never moved but by outward circumstances, and tangible ones, too."

"Well, my dear, I must say your reasoning is not very tangible to my mind just at present. I think you have left out a few links in the chain, which might enlighten me rather more on the subject, if you would put them in,—that glance tells me that you have no idea of doing any such thing, and that I must remain in my ignorance. Is it not so?"

"I am afraid it must be so, Ethel, for I do not know myself well enough to make up the links, even if I had the wish to inflict my inner life upon you."

"You do not know how gladly I would enter into it, dear Grace. I always thought there was something in Agnes's mind, or character, that I could not understand; but until lately I have believed you to be a crystallization, a regular transparency."

"And I have had pretty much the same opinion of you until lately, so I suppose the best thing we can do is to put up with each other as we are, without trying to discover what lies too deep to be seen."

Ethel thought Grace in a very strange mood, and that this was not at all like the language of friendship. Still, she could not help acknowledging to herself that the feeling was a mutual one, though she would not like to put the acknowledgment into words, and the idea occurred to her that Grace must have a secret of the same kind. But though these

thoughts rushed through her mind, she only said, gaily,—

"If that be the case, I suppose we must talk about our neighbours, and not ourselves. So, to begin with the last of them whom I have seen. Do you not think Mr. Percival is very unromantic to have forgotten Agnes so soon?"

"Why should you think he has forgotten?"

"Because he was just now seated in exactly the same place beside your mama at Roseneath which he occupied the last day I saw him, in company with Agnes, and talking just in the same tone, and looking as unconcerned as if the past had all been a dream."

"He has been so often at Roseneath since his return, that any feeling of that sort must be blunted by this time."

"If the feeling were there," answered Ethel, "he would not have been so ready to go to Roseneath, where it might be blunted, for I believe, with all his goodness, he is human still."

"You would not have been so ready to find fault with him, Ethel, had you been with us the first day he came to see mama after his return; he looked wretched enough to please even you."

"I wish you would give me your recipe for making people happy. He looked most remarkably comfortable to-day, and very much as if he wished me at the Antipodes. I had a great wish to say, 'I beg your pardon,' and be off."

"Ethel, how can you talk so?" remonstrated Grace, as she turned her head away to hide the unbidden tears that had rushed to her eyes.

"Dear Grace, I did not mean to distress you, but indeed it is quite provoking to see him forget Agnes so completely in a few months."

"I should be very glad to think he had forgotten her," said Grace, with a sigh; and then she added, quickly, "for his own sake, for I heard him tell mama that there was not anything worth living for but to be of use to others, and that the only interest he had in life was his parish."

"Well! well! I see plainly we have fallen on an unfortunate subject; so we had better change it, as we cannot agree; for if I were to give my real opinion I should shock you beyond forgiveness."

Grace smiled sadly, as she said,—

"That would indeed overtax your powers, Ethel."

"I will not dispute the matter with you," Ethel laughingly responded, "but, as I said, change the subject. Have you heard lately from Agnes?"

"Yes; I have had several letters since she has been in Paris. It appears to have given her new life, and I really think she is enjoying herself very much."

"What does she say of Gerald's enjoyment of the matter? For I suspect it is not much to his taste."

Grace coloured. "Oh, she does not mention Gerald."

"It is not worth a blush, Grace, my dear; Agnes's happiness will never depend upon her husband, she never intended it should. She is not in the least like you in any respect. But there is the dressing-bell at the Abbey, and if I do not make my appearance in due time Lady Augusta will look swords and daggers at me."

"Ethel, dear!"

"I require sadly to be kept in order to-day, and I believe it was my good star that brought me to you for the purpose." And then, as she was turning away, she added, "Monmouth is coming home; at least he is going to Paris."

And she turned quickly into a path in the plantation which led to the Abbey, and reached it in due time, to avoid the swords and daggers, which, however, existed only in her own imagination, as Lady Augusta was far too politic to annoy Ethel even by a look.

In some degree Ethel was right in her opinion of Mr. Percival. He had returned in a state of the most complete wretchedness, for he was alone. He had not felt the misery of tearing Agnes's image from his heart, but he had felt what was far worse, that it had dropped away from it without his being able to retain it. The idol had fallen defaced from its pedestal. The mist that surrounded her, which had been turned into a purely golden one by his sunny imagination, had dispersed, and Agnes Egerton stood forth in her true character—of the earth, earthy. He felt convinced that he could have borne all—anything—had she not fallen so very low in his estimation. Could he only have kept up the ideal he had formed of her, the very foundation of which he could not now trace. But it was in reality far better for him that her image had been defaced. Had it been otherwise, his was a nature that would have preserved its recollection for ever; and all the after happiness of his life would have been sacrificed. He felt on his return as if the sacrifice had been consummated. Agnes had been almost from her childhood mingled in his every thought, entwined round every fibre of his being; it was not surprising, therefore, that he should feel as if his very individuality were lost to him, when she had passed from his future, Gradually, however, he awakened from this trance-like state, and awakened so completely as to be able to discern the faults of her

character, and to thank God that He had taken her from him. The prostration of his mind was not such as would keep him from seeking Mrs. Egerton's society; indeed, his visits to Roseneath appeared the only interest still left to him; and in contrasting Grace's character with that of her sister—which he unconsciously did—he felt as if he had found a truth —that there was something to rest upon; and as she was in every respect unlike Agnes, it was natural that he should trust the one in proportion as he had learned to distrust the other. This transition came on so gradually that he was not himself aware of the fact of his growing attachment to Grace, an attachment very unlike his passionate love for Agnes, but quite as deep, and much more inextinguishable.

Grace, on her part, though from her knowledge of his devotion to Agnes she had never allowed herself to give it the name of love, had long given up to him every feeling of her earnest though gentle nature; nor was she in the least aware of this, until just before Agnes's engagement to Gerald. It was the shock of the discovery, and the subsequent struggle with herself, that paled her cheek and gave a deeper tinge of gravity to her manner, which appeared so unaccountable to Ethel. But we must leave both Mr. Percival and Grace to enjoy the new source of happiness that was opening to them, and follow Agnes to Paris.

CHAPTER XV.

THE novelty of everything in Paris was at first quite sufficient to detach the volatile and excitable mind of Agnes from brooding over the misery she had brought upon herself; and as the roses returned to her cheeks, and the brilliant smiles to those coral lips, Gerald felt that, so long as he could prevent her from mixing with, and being contaminated by, the Parisian world—in fact, so long as he could keep her entirely to himself, he might be happy. This could not last. Unfortunately, Gerald had no confidence in Agnes's love for him, or, to speak more truly, he was quite convinced that she had not even common regard for him. He knew it when he proposed for her, and he felt it most acutely when he married her; and as time passed on, month succeeding month, and still the ice was unbroken between them, he looked forward with actual terror to the period at which he must bring her into society, and must in a great measure leave her to herself. The dreaded period was nearer than he imagined it to be. Agnes was beginning to tire of sight-seeing, and wished to know some of the many people who bowed to Gerald, and gazed at her with such evident admiration. A few of these acquaintances he had presented to her; but they were not the young or the gay; and she pined for that excitement without which she could not crush the thoughts which again began

to assail her, of happiness thrown wilfully away, and unhappiness self-inflicted by her ambition and her vanity.

One day, as she was driving with Gerald in an open carriage on the *Boulevards*, she saw an English phæton approaching, most beautifully-appointed, though very plain. It was driven by a very handsome woman, who might have been declared *passée* had she made any pretensions to youth; but it was very evident that, though accustomed to admiration, she received it in her own character. She looked earnestly at Gerald, and seemed almost inclined to draw up her prancing horses. He, however, looked sedulously the other way, as if he were lost in admiration of a pretty little *grisette* who was passing by at the moment.

"Who is that?" exclaimed Agnes.

"Some pretty little milliner, I suppose," he answered, carelessly.

"Some pretty little nonsense," retorted Agnes. "I mean the lady who was driving the phæton, and who passed you quite closely."

"I was looking on the pathway," he replied, a shade of displeasure darkening his countenance, as he uttered the implied falsehood. Agnes had none of that discretion which would have induced her to appear satisfied with any explanation he might be pleased to offer her; and she turned such a scrutinizing gaze on his face, that the colour mounted to his temples, and, to escape her observation, he whipped the horses, who reared, and then started forward, as if they were about to run away. But Agnes was not nervous, and instead of frightening her thoughts into another channel by this little manœuvre, it only served to fix them more closely on the lady in the phæton; so, as soon as the horses had regained their firmer pace, she said,—

"I hope we shall meet that lady again; I am sure, Gerald, she knew you. She was evidently disposed to draw up when her eye fell upon you."

"You will have enough to employ your imagination, Agnes," Gerald replied, "if you take a fancy to all the English you meet."

"It is going too far to say I have taken a fancy to her, but I really am very curious about her, and I should like to meet her again."

"It is not probable that your desire will be gratified, my love," said Gerald, in a gentle tone of voice, as if he were afraid of further rousing his wife's curiosity. "Paris is a large place, and just at present there are many English in it."

"I wish, Gerald, if you intend remaining here, you would take an *appartement*, and receive your friends; we might as well have stayed in Switzerland as come to Paris and live in an hotel, where we never see any one."

Gerald felt very much inclined to wreak his annoyance on the horses, but a little consideration told him that he must answer, so he said,—

"As soon as you are tired of Paris, Agnes, I shall be ready to go!"

"Go where?" asked she, in alarm, as a vision of Dunmere and Lady Augusta rose to her view.

"Anywhere you like, dearest," said he, turning on her a look of fondness, that smote on her conscience, and even to bringing the tears into her eyes; but instead of answering, she began to reflect on the injustice she had done her husband, and then swiftly back flew her thoughts to the efforts she had made to gain the heart that she now would give anything never to have won; until, oppressed by a feeling of actual remorse, she sunk

her head on her hand, with her usual selfish yielding to the impulse of the moment, totally forgetting the unhappiness she might be inflicting on her husband.

After waiting in vain for some reply, he turned away with a deep sigh, and the remainder of the drive was passed in silence.

CHAPTER XVI.

In a boudoir, furnished with all the luxuries that Paris could produce, sat the lady who had attracted so much of Agnes's attention. She, too, had returned from her drive, and, as she half reclined on the sofa, her personal appearance and all her surroundings as much declared her the woman of fashion as her plain but perfectly-appointed carriage had done when she was driving. The subdued light of the room had softened the brilliancy of her beauty; and the extreme elegance of her dress, in perfect keeping with herself, left nothing for the eye to desire. While she was thus enjoying the luxury of a quiet rest, and a book, which any one looking on her calm noble brow would know she could well appreciate, the Marquis de Vilière was announced.

The lady seemed particularly glad at this announcement. She was not a person to be easily pleased, and therefore the marquis must have had some greater attraction than his face and figure, which were both such as any woman might admire.

He was a perfect French gentleman, a man of great natural talent, which, from the nature of his country's government, had no legitimate object on which to expend itself, and had therefore all been frittered away on the art of pleasing. He was not very young, but this was rather in his favour, as his experience gave

him the power of going deeper into the characters of those to whom he devoted himself for the time being. He had, however, met his match in the lady into whose presence he was now ushered. He had been but a few minutes in the room before she said,—

"By the way, I am sure I have seen the angel whose description you painted in such glowing colours last evening. If I am right in my conjecture, I know her husband."

"Indeed," replied her visitor. "I hope you will be so compassionate as to present me to her."

"A most Quixotic proceeding," said the lady, shaking her head. "I am afraid any attempt of the kind would make Mr. Longueville put an iron mask on his lovely wife."

"Is she married to Gerald Longueville?" replied the marquis. "He was one of my greatest friends last year; but I was not aware of his being in Paris now, as I have not met him anywhere."

"Because he has shut himself up in Meurice's," responded the lady.

"Oh! if that is all, I will soon hunt him out of his defences. But the lovely girl who so enchanted me was going into the Louvre with a solemn-looking old lady in black, and two dismal-looking young ones in grey. A beautiful woman is like a fine diamond, the effect of which is considerably enhanced by being set with other diamonds of equal value. But this radiant creature of whom I speak was an exception even to this rule; she did not stand in need of any adventitious circumstances to enhance her loveliness; she was one of the most perfect beings I ever saw."

"I feel very much inclined to call on Mrs. Longueville, at Meurice's, and as you are a friend of Mr.

Longueville's, you might meet me there just as I am about to pay my visit."

Of course the invitation was accepted with pleasure, and the lady continued,—

"Even if Mrs. Longueville should not be the beautiful unknown you are so anxious to become acquainted with, I think you will acknowledge that our country is rich in beauty, for I never beheld a lovelier face than hers."

"I am quite ready to acknowledge that already," said he, with a glance of admiration at his hostess. The compliment was accepted, though not acknowledged, by the lady.

But it is time that we should introduce this fair lady by name to our readers. She was the Duchess of Tyne, at whose house Gerald had always been a welcome visitor when in London. But although he had admired her, and always considered her society as a sure resource against *ennui*, yet she was not a person he would have chosen as a friend for Agnes, though perhaps it was rather more with her set than with herself that he would have disliked any intimacy for his young wife. The duchess held the Marquis de Vilière's opinion that beauty ought to be well set; and she collected around her all that was lovely and fascinating in woman—all that was clever and attractive in man; so that if not quite resplendent herself, she shone more resplendently by reflection. Her house, wherever she happened to be placed, was always looked upon by the world as the very temple of fashion and pleasure. Her husband was immersed in politics, and scarcely found time to remain with her on the continent for more than a few weeks together. He was proud of his wife, and had the greatest con-

fidence in her integrity. He disliked the society she assembled around her, and occasionally entered a protest against one or two, of whom he saw reason particularly to disapprove; and as the duchess always dropped the acquaintance of the interdicted ones without a demur, he felt obliged to yield to her the rest, all the more that he did not know how to change it, and that she did not give him any assistance in doing so.

At the appointed hour M. de Vilière handed the duchess from her carriage at Meurice's.

Agnes had been trying to glean something like amusement from *Galignani*, and had just thrown it aside with an impatient sigh, that betrayed perhaps more of sorrow than a deeper one might have done, when she was startled by the door being thrown open. She expected to see Gerald enter, for he had gone to his bankers; and was to return to take her for their usual drive, which Agnes looked upon as but one degree less wearisome than the newspaper and her sofa. It was therefore with a sensation of natural delight that she beheld before her the lady she had so much wished to meet again, attended by the Marquis de Vilière. Agnes, in her ignorance of society, would have thought the acquaintance of any duchess a safe and sufficient introduction to the highest circles, and consequently would have received with pleasure the visit of the Duchess of Tyne, even if she had been as unprepossessing as most of the few whose acquaintance Gerald had allowed her to make. But nothing of this appeared in her manner, as she rose to receive her husband's friends; and all parties being determined to be pleased, the visitors prolonged their stay, and before the duchess left, she had appointed to call on

Agnes the next day to take her to Versailles, to see a château in the neighbourhood, which she was about renting for a short time.

"I have not a seat to offer Mr. Longueville," she said; "but I hope you will consent to part with him for one day."

Agnes blushed very deeply at the idea of the great difference there was between her feelings in the prospect of absenting herself for a few hours from her husband and those which even the fashionable duchess seemed actually to expect in the young bride, while the duchess, on her part, fancied that Mrs. Longueville was about to sacrifice herself to please her new acquaintance, for which act of courtesy she accordingly thanked her; and, on her departure, Agnes remained in such an ecstasy of delight that she actually longed for Gerald's return, in order to have some one to talk to of her happiness, not doubting that he would be as pleased as herself at recognizing an old friend—for such she conceived the duchess to be—in the unknown whom she had so much admired.

When Gerald did return at last, she recounted to him, in a rapture of delight, all that had been said and done during the visit, and even gave him a glowing description of the marquis; while darker fell the shadow on Gerald's countenance, unheeded by Agnes, till she reached the invitation for the next day, when he started, and exclaimed,—

"You have not accepted it, Agnes!"

"Of course I have," replied she; "why should I not?"

"Because," he answered, "you are too young and inexperienced to form intimacies for yourself. This is one of the reasons I have wished you to enter society by degrees."

"Then I suppose I am not to go?" she inquired, looking up at him. He hesitated as to what he ought to do, or rather as to what he could; and Agnes, concluding that her doom was sealed, like a spoiled child disappointed of a new plaything, burst into a passionate flood of tears. Gerald had often fancied that she had been weeping in secret, but he had never seen her tears before, and notwithstanding the frivolity of the occasion which had now called them forth, he was completely subdued, and fondly caressing her, he murmured,—

"My dearest love, you shall do as you like; I only think it is rather unkind of the duchess to take you away from me for so long."

The kindness of his manner, when she might have expected reproof for her extreme childishness, made Agnes thoroughly ashamed of herself, and with her eyes still overflowing, she turned to him and said, softly,—

"Dear Gerald, I will not go if it gives you pain."

The epithet of endearment, the first she had ever used to him, caused Gerald's heart to bound; he could not have denied her anything at the moment, and he replied,—

"No, my love, you shall do as you like now, and always,—only love me, my own darling."

Agnes hid her face on his shoulder, and as he pressed her to his heart, she could scarcely restrain another burst of grief. There were moments when she longed to love him; and perhaps had her heart been free at the period of her marriage, she might have succeeded, notwithstanding her deeply-rooted dislike to him from her childhood. All day she was trying to summon up courage enough to write an excuse to

the duchess, but she was too selfishly delighted at the anticipation of so much unrestrained enjoyment to forego it, although she was fully aware of the pleasure she would confer on her husband by so doing.

She prepared the next morning for her excursion, with anything but an easy conscience; for she knew Gerald did not approve of the duchess as a friend for her, though he had not exactly said so. When the time came, however, she forgot all, in the amusement of the passing hour.

The Duchess of Tyne was a person who could always fascinate where she chose to do so. She suspected Gerald's wish that his wife should avoid her set; but it suited her to court the young and lovely Mrs. Longueville, as another ornament and attraction to her house; she therefore brought into play all her charm of manner and intellectual superiority, to gain a place in Agnes's fancy. That she succeeded with one so young and inexperienced, is saying little for her powers, which had often been triumphantly exerted on those who were predetermined to resist her influence, and more capable of doing so than Agnes.

Gerald was greatly relieved in the evening, when, amidst all Agnes's raptures, he drew from her the admission, without betraying his anxiety on the subject, that she had spent the day alone with the duchess.

Independently of the natural jealousy of his disposition, the Marquis de Vilière was almost the last man of his acquaintance whom he could endure as an attendant on his wife, and it was his intimacy with the Duke and Duchess of Tyne which in a great measure excited in Gerald so strong a desire to prevent

any intercourse between this lady and his wife, during their stay in Paris. But he did not really know the duchess, though she thoroughly understood him, and was quite aware that if Agnes were to be to her anything more than a mere casual acquaintance, she must not lose sight of the peculiarity of his temperament. But independently of this, she knew full well that the marquis would be an unsafe companion for one whose character contained so much of levity, and at the same time so much of innocent confidence in the world, of which it was plain that she knew no more than a child; so the duchess silently resolved to take Agnes under her especial guardianship. The Longuevilles did not see much of her for the next fortnight; but little as it was, Agnes appeared to live upon it, and a slight hint from Gerald that it was time to leave Paris was met by such irresistible entreaties to remain, that he could not but yield to them. Indeed, could he have felt the same confidence in Agnes which the Duke of Tyne reposed in his wife, Gerald might have been happier than he had ever been before; for since a prospect of amusement had opened upon Agnes, her manner towards him had quite changed.

As the weeks passed on, the intimacy strengthened, entailing upon Gerald, as he had foreseen, the necessity for introducing his wife into general society; and as the sweetness of her manner increased, so did her independence of action. In this she not only followed her own inclination, but imitated her new friend, totally unmindful, and even unconscious, of the difference between a perfect woman of the world and herself, so young and so thoroughly ignorant of even the forms of the vortex into which she was blindly rushing.

CHAPTER XVII.

After the receipt of Ethel's letter, Monmouth felt that he could remain in the East without that wretchedness which he had imagined had been home-sickness, but which in reality arose from the gulf he had placed between himself and Ethel. Her letter was the bridge that spanned that gulf, and, from the frankness of her nature, he knew that if he could persuade her to contiuue to write to him, he should by means of her letters become intimate with all that concerned or interested her, and that under such circumstances separation was not separation in reality. He had, however, accepted the appointment of *attaché* to his friend, who was about to leave for Paris, and he did not wish to draw back, particularly as he had been requested to meet the ambassador immediately. Gerald being there was another inducement held out to him, and one which he fully appreciated, for the brothers were warmly attached to each other.

Sunshine had returned to the Abbey, and to Roseneath, for Monmouth had succeeded in keeping up the correspondence so happily begun by Ethel. His letters to her were long and frequent; but their tone was always a fraternal one; and thus he contrived to delude himself into the idea that he was injuring none but himself,—than which there never was a greater fallacy. No human being can retain evil with himself. If it be evil, it must perform its office, and injure all

it touches. Agnes's letters to Grace were written in such a happy strain that the latter fondly hoped that all cause for anxiety was removed, and that Agnes had at last found happiness; but, greatly to Grace's surprise, it appeared to be happiness entirely independent of her husband; for if Gerald had never existed, his name could not have been more completely excluded from his wife's correspondence. Agnes altogether was a cause of astonishment to Grace; but not a greater enigma than Mr. Percival. One day that he was at Roseneath he picked up one of Agnes's letters that had fallen from Grace's workbox. She took it from him with a heightened colour, not daring to raise her eyes to his face, well knowing that he must have recognized the handwriting, which was remarkably beautiful. Scarcely was the letter replaced in her box, and the cover quickly shut to hide from him what she so much feared might agitate him, than she was surprised by his asking, in a perfectly indifferent tone,—

"Where is Agnes now?"

Grace's startled glance and deep blush did not escape his observation as she answered,—

"In Paris."

With that singular frankness which very reserved people sometimes display, he said,—

"Agnes is no more to me now than any other woman. What she was to me, you know, perhaps better than she knew herself."

Grace turned very pale—she tried to look up—she tried to speak, but both appeared utterly impossible.

He sat looking at her for a few minutes, and then added,—

"You do not think me right in changing my mind so quickly?"

Poor Grace absolutely gasped as she stammered —

"I do not know."

This was not at all what she would have said if she could have collected her scattered ideas, and it was no sooner uttered than she felt that it was the very last thing she wished to say. His brow flushed as he answered,—

"I wish I dared prove to you that it could not have been otherwise; but Agnes is your sister, and——"

He stopped abruptly.

Grace was saved the embarrassment of being again obliged to speak, by the apparition of Ethel at the window, who, not seeing Mr. Percival, exclaimed,—

"What in the world is the matter with you, Grace? You look like a ghost. Has your pastor been giving you a lecture on the impropriety of young ladies wearing roses?"

"No, indeed, Miss Gordon," said Mr. Percival, bending forward as he spoke; "I so much approve of young ladies wearing roses, that I should be very glad if you could prevail on Grace to go out this lovely day in search of them."

"Oh, Mr. Percival," exclaimed Ethel, "I did not think you were so ill-natured."

"I have never before been accused of that heinous offence," replied he, with one of his radiant smiles, "and I am quite at a loss to know how I have incurred the accusation from you?"

"I will constitute you your own judge," she answered. "Do you not acknowledge that it was very ill-natured of you not to show yourself when I spoke of you just now? There is no knowing," she added, laughing, "what I might have said—enough to make us enemies for life."

"You gave me very little time," he replied, "and even if you had, I could never have been afraid of Miss Gordon saying anything unkind."

"Grace! Grace!" Ethel exclaimed, "is not that too bad! to hear Mr. Percival paying compliments! What has become of your boast that there was one man at least in the world who was never guilty of such a thing?"

Grace, though the gentlest of human beings, actually sprang from her seat at this unexpected speech, and ran out of the room, leaving Ethel gazing after her in amazement, and Mr. Percival with the softest expression lighting up his whole face.

"Well, well!" said Ethel, "I believe the whole world is bewitched. I never could have imagined that Grace would fly off like a rocket. But I must go and look after her." So saying, she entered by the window, and followed her friend. She found her in her own room, where Ethel was in the habit of seeking her, when she was not in her usual place in the morning room. It was an unwilling voice that granted her admittance on the present occasion. No one could accuse Grace of want of roses when Ethel opened her door. She was standing like a frightened fawn in the middle of the room, as if she would have flown had there been any mode of egress.

"Grace," Ethel began, "I do not know whether to ask to be forgiven, or to scold you for flying off at a tangent. But, do you know, Mr. Percival puzzled me quite as much as you did, he looked so particularly pleased. Do you think he was glad to get rid of you, or happy that you defended the absent?

"Oh, Ethel, you don't know what you have done. I shall never be able to face Mr. Percival again!" exclaimed Grace, almost passionately.

"That would be a dreadful loss, my dear," answered Ethel, smiling, "for I think he becomes handsomer every time I see him. I never saw him look so well as he does to-day, particularly after you ran away; you should have stayed to see, but then perhaps the exciting cause would not have been there. But what is the matter with you, Grace, dear," she exclaimed, as she saw her turn very pale and sink on the sofa. The whole appeared to strike Ethel in an instant, and sitting down beside Grace, she threw her arm round her, and whispered. "Do not mind, dearest; he will never know, and even if he did, I could not be sorry, for believe me, Grace, he loves you."

Grace returned her embrace, and, in a broken voice, said,—

"Oh! Ethel, it is so humiliating that others should learn, through my own folly, what I have never dared to acknowledge even to myself."

Ethel felt all the misery that Grace must be experiencing, and, to comfort her, she said,—

"There is nothing humiliating, dearest Grace, in returning such affection as I am convinced, and have for some time been convinced, that he feels for you; and you know, after all, he is not vain, and therefore, so far as he is concerned, your secret is safe."

Poor Grace! This was too much, tearing even the shred of a veil from what she had flattered herself she should have power to conceal from every eye. She gazed at Ethel, as if she doubted whether she could mean what her words implied; and then turning from her in silence, she hid her face in the cushion, and burst into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing.

Ethel allowed her to sob without interruption, feeling, from her own experience, what relief it would afford.

Grace did not weep long, for she was not a girl to give way for any length of time to feelings that she had always been in the habit of controlling. In a few minutes, therefore, she raised her head, and said,—

"Will you make me one promise, Ethel?"

"Any promise you like, my own darling Grace, if it will only restore you to yourself."

"Thank you, dear. The promise I wish you to make me is, that you will never allude to this subject again. You cannot tell how unutterably painfully it would be to me."

"Most willingly," Ethel answered; "and in keeping my word I shall only do as I would be done by." She sighed deeply as she finished speaking; and they both rose, as if afraid to trust themselves in the mutually confidential attitude in which they were sitting on the sofa. Ethel asked Grace to walk with her, under the impression that the open air would enable her to regain her usually good spirits sooner than anything else. She saw that Grace hesitated, and she longed to tell her that their was no danger of their meeting Mr. Percival, as she had heard him leave the house; but she was afraid she should be encroaching on the interdicted subject, so she suddenly checked herself. Grace answered her thoughts by putting out her hand, and saying,—

"Thank you, dearest; I knew I could trust you." And the two friends went out for a walk almost as silent as their rambles had been a few weeks before.

Mr. Percival had indeed left the house almost immediately, for though in a dream of pleasure, or rather of newly-born happiness, he did not expect that Grace would return to the room while he remained there. For the first time since the day he had heard of

Agnes's engagement to Gerald Longueville, he looked forward with something like hope to the future. The hope, however, was but slight; for, as Ethel had said, he was not naturally a vain man, and the disappointment of his first love had made him even more distrustful of his own powers of pleasing; so, though he could not think that Grace in any way resembled her sister, yet he was obliged to acknowledge to himself that she had never given him the least reason to hope before that day, whereas Agnes had promised to be his, and had cast him off for another apparently without a pang. Might he not therefore be mistaken in the one as well as in the other? Now that he really loved Grace, he felt much more inclined to doubt her. This tendency to suspicion was caused, not by his love, for real love leads to trust, but by the deception so heartlessly practised upon him by Agnes. A woman who betrays the affections of a man who loves her, even without going to so great an extent as breaking an actual engagement, almost always injures others besides.

So it was with Mr. Percival. Agnes had so deceived him that he was almost disposed to doubt the whole race of womankind.

This evening, as if to torment him, the image of Agnes rose before him, surrounded by the halo which the first conviction, on her part, of his love for her had cast around her, and her rare beauty intensified by the varying expression of her countenance, which had shown him that his affection had been returned. Again she was before him as he had seen her just before she had paid her first visit to the Abbey, which was destined to prove fatal to her happiness. He could trust then, for he had never been betrayed.

It was with wonder, rather than regret, that he recalled it all, for beside her image arose another, so calm, so pure, so full of feeling, yet so totally different from that of his former idol, that he was feeling, if indeed he could win her, she would be won for ever; and again his thoughts reverted with pleasure to the little spark of hope held out to him by Ethel's unguarded repetition of Grace's speech about him.

Days glided into weeks, and yet still Grace contrived to elude every effort of his to meet her. To another man this evident wish to avoid him might have appeared an additional reason for hoping, as it showed that she had reason to dread his discovering something she wished to conceal; but to him it only brought the fear that she shunned him lest he might presume on her uncontrollable agitation. But whether with or without encouragement, his was not a disposition to remain inactive, while watching the course of events. He longed to see Grace, in the hope that if she really cared for him, he could not but see some sign of it in her manner after what had passed.

At first Grace shut herself up in her room, but fearing that Mrs. Egerton might send there for her, she would leave the house by a side-door as soon as she knew that Mr. Percival was safely engaged with her mother. Her favourite resort was a grotto, built over the source of a small river, which, as if rejoicing at its escape from the darkness, danced sparkling over the broken rocks, and pursued its way noisily, until it reached the sunshine in the open glade, where, as if subdued by its bright rays, it murmured gently onwards to its quiet rest in the lake. She chose this place of retreat, secure that, as the pathway stopped at the grotto, behind which rose a great rock covered

with brushwood and wild climbing plants, Mr. Percival was not likely to invade her solitude.

But she was mistaken. Young ladies who wish to hide themselves amongst green leaves should not wear light-coloured dresses, at least not when lovers' eyes are on the watch for them.

Mr. Percival more than suspected that Grace's repeated absence could not be altogether the result of accident; and when he once caught a distant glimpse of her by the river, after an unusually brief visit to Roseneath,—if the truth must be told, made intentionally so, for the purpose of acting the spy,—he at once determined to follow her. What motive led him to this determination he could not exactly explain, even to himself. But as he walked along the wild pathway, he disentangled his ideas on the subject sufficiently to come to the conclusion that his abrupt appearance would at least enable him to penetrate somewhat into the real state of Grace's heart, by observing the effect it produced upon her; so that he might ascertain whether she was avoiding him from the wish to convince him of her indifference, or from the fear of betraying the feeling with which he was so anxious to inspire her.

Grace, as was her wont, had taken a book with her, and though but little inclined to read, she made most laudable endeavours to do so. She was sitting on a rock just at the entrance of the grotto, but quite hidden by the thick ivy that hung from the archway from the view of any one approaching. On her lap lay her book, and her eyes were fixed with an earnest gaze on the noisy waters, that rushed foaming past her, her mind tormenting her by the oft-repeated wish that she could muster courage sufficient to meet Mr.

Percival as if nothing had occurred. How much positive enjoyment she had already lost by absenting herself from his society, which had for years formed the centre of her happiness, round which all her thoughts unconsciously grouped themselves! How difficult would it be for her ever again to meet him as a friend! Such reflections were crowding upon her, when, on turning, she saw, through an opening in the ivy, that Mr. Percival was drawing near. She started and tremblingly watched him for a few minutes, until a bend in the path concealed him from her sight, then, springing up, and dropping her book unheeded in her fright, the idea struck her of hiding behind the grotto, under the rock, before he should again appear. She acted upon the impulse of the moment. But a very short concealment made her regret having done so, for her terror almost amounted to agony, as she heard his step approaching, lest she should be discovered.

He came, and at the first glance at her book lying on the ground his heart bounded with joy, though it might have puzzled him to tell what this had to say to the reception he was likely to receive from its owner. He stopped to pick it up, and then pushing aside into its curtain, entered the grotto. But it was with a sensation of blank dismay that he gazed around and found it empty.

"Passing strange!" he ejaculated. "Can she have fled from me even here? Fool that I am, perhaps she does not think of me at all," he added, after a brief pause. Then sinking on one of the seats, he covered his face with his hands, and remained for some time absorbed in thought, till, with a heavy sigh, he rose and left the grotto, without even turning to look for Grace amongst the rocks whither she might have climbed in

search of wild flowers, botany being a favourite pursuit of hers,—a fact which he well knew, as he had often assisted her in the study of it. But, to quote his own words, "passing strange" was the change a few minutes' suffering under the sting of disappointment had effected in him. Like all real lovers, he believed the object of his affections too perfect for him to gain her affections, and what a few days before had given him such hope now seemed to imbue him with a sort of despair. He deemed it proof positive that she only regarded him in the light of a friend, and that her agitation had arisen from the high tone of her mind. In reverting to his feelings for Agnes, he could trace much reason for blame in himself with respect to his dealings with her. He could now perceive how he had wilfully blinded himself, not only to her faults, but to the whole tenor of her character, which was essentially worldly, and he almost trembled at the idea of what might have been her influence on his spiritual life had he married her while thus blind to all her defects, and yet adoring her as he did; more especially as her power over him would have been unbounded, from the affection that she would probably have shown for him. And now, when his heart turned so devotedly to Grace, he felt completely unworthy of her. Could she,—he argued with himself,—accept a heart that had not only been offered to another, but had by that other been cast off with contempt. The more he pondered over it, the more convinced he was that his passion for Agnes did not deserve the name of love; that it was mere idolatry of beauty, which he now felt as sinful, even to a degree of remorse. His character was much like a volcanic mountain, grand and unapproachable, but full of fire, ready to burst forth yet it was only in soli-

tude that the storm broke over him, and that he gave himself up to the real force of those feelings which were reduced to subjection when he came into contact with his fellow men. On leaving the grotto, those feelings completely mastered him. He cast himself on the ground, with his face pressed into the long grass, as if bowed by the blast of bitterness that rushed through heart and brain. It was well that the same cause, though moderated by the gentleness of her womanly nature, kept Grace within the grotto, for she could not have returned by any path but the one beside which he had thrown himself, in the sudden revulsion of spirit that had overpowered him.

While he stayed in the grotto, Grace remained immovable in her place of concealment. Her very heart appeared to stand still, for she had heard every word he had uttered in his despair. At first these words of his sent a thrill of happiness through her that she had never before experienced; but soon came the blighting thought, "If Agnes had not married, he never would have loved me. It cannot be really love that he feels for me. I will no longer let him suppose I am avoiding him, nor shall he have the opportunity of seeing me alone. He will soon change again—perhaps to Ethel next." It is rather strange that this last suggestion of her evil genius gave her a sting that might have told her that, at least, she did not wish him to change.

However, notwithstanding the warning she might have taken from it, she resolved to meet him with apparent calmness and treat him as if he were a friend, and a friend only, She carried out her resolution shortly after, and met him with as much composure

of manner as if nothing had occurred to break the uniformity of their lives.

He also had been schooling himself to appear only as her friend, sadly convinced that he had mistaken her the day she had left the room so suddenly. And again commenced the play that is so often acted in real life, and which so often ends fatally to the happiness of those who engage in it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AGAIN we must meet our party in Paris, to which Monmouth had added his presence, and where all the world of fashion were beginning to congregate. Amongst others, Sir Mark Eveleen, whose pretty wife had not succeeded in making him either wiser or more amiable.

Monmouth's anxiety was in part relieved by remarking that Gerald was more satisfied with Agnes than he had ventured to hope would be the case; and indeed, to a less interested observer, all would have appeared right between them; but Monmouth knew Gerald's jealous disposition too well not to feel assured that he must feel something not far removed from misery in seeing Agnes the centre of a circle of scarcely undeclared admirers. Neither of the brothers really knew Agnes's character, for,—notwithstanding her decided love of admiration, and a manner that might be said to arise from either levity, or innocence, according to the charity or want of charity of the interpreter of it,—she looked with thorough contempt on all the triflers who surrounded her, and she rather disliked the Marquis de Vilière than otherwise; but as the Duchess of Tyne's friend, she allowed him always to flutter round her. Had she loved her husband she must have perceived the constant care this caused him; and probably, had he been assured of her affection, he might not have

taken such pains to conceal from her his dislike of the marquis, which was considerably greater than her own. But Gerald was still in love with his wife, and to win her smiles, which she never accorded him on any other conditions, he gladly yielded to all her wishes, or rather to her caprices. One of her caprices,—for it did not deserve a more exalted appellation,—was her devotion to the Duchess of Tyne, who had gained complete ascendancy over her. It annoyed Gerald, who could be jealous even of a female friend; but he was well aware of the meanness of his ruling passion, and employed the utmost caution not only to hide it from his wife, but from all the world, knowing the ridicule it would elicit from the young men of his own set, and how much more it would expose Agnes to their attentions.

The duchess was about to give a splendid entertainment at her Château near Versailles, which the railroad had now brought close to Paris, and where she and Agnes spent much of their time, superintending the improvements and embellishments preparatory to the grand fête, which was to be the wonder of the season. If it had been all her own, Agnes could not have been more enthusiastic on the subject than she was, and as she dilated upon it to Gerald, he often looked at her beaming face with admiration, and for a time forgot how gladly he would have flown with her from Paris and all its gaieties.

The triumphant day at last arrived; but at its outset a slight cloud dimmed Agnes's horizon; for when the post came in, Gerald found that he had business to transact with his banker which would cause some delay. He wished particularly that Agnes should not go alone, but his desire to keep her away altogether,

made him fancy that every hour he could detain her from the fête, would be something gained. He therefore resolved to make his business an excuse, and though he had not the courage to tell Agnes expressly not to go without him, yet he said, before he left her,—

"I will not keep you long, dearest, and I daresay you will spend a greater length of time in your dressing-room to-day than usual."

"Why, Gerald," she replied, laughing, "do you think I am bent on conquest more to-day than usual? I am afraid there will be no temptation, for I am sure there will not be a new face to be seen."

Gerald absolutely turned pale at this extraordinary speech of his beautiful wife. So powerful was its effect, that he was afraid to trust himself to answer her. He looked at her as he had never done before; but his gaze rested only on a lovely pair of white eyelids, and a most bewitching smile, as she carelessly folded and sealed a note she had just finished, all unconscious of the shock her words had caused her husband. He dreaded the result of anything like reproof on his part, and he did not turn from the window where he was standing, until he had sufficiently mastered himself to speak with his usual calmness. Then he said,—

"I sometimes wish, Agnes, that the next ten years were passed."

A merry laugh broke in upon his remark, and she exclaimed,—

"If you think, my dear sir, that I mean to be an old woman in ten years, you are quite mistaken."

She stopped and looked at him with one of her most fascinating glances.

"I was not thinking of your growing old, dearest, but I confess I wish you to have a little more experience of the world, with which you appear so charmed."

"Oh! you have experience enough for both," she replied, in a careless tone, that grated unpleasantly on his jarred feelings; "but we are wasting our time,—that is, if you must go out on business to-day, which is really very teazing."

"There is no necessity to be so early at such places, my love, so you need not be uneasy if I keep you waiting rather later than you desire."

"Oh! but indeed I shall be very impatient," said she, calling after him as he left the room.

On his way Gerald met Monmouth, and fearing that Agnes might take him for an escort if she were kept waiting too long, he linked his arm in his brother's, and drew him along with him, without giving him any reason for doing so.

When Agnes's most *recherché* toilet had been completed, she fluttered about from room to room, and from window to window, with all the eager excitement of a child.

She waited long, but at last, fearful that if Gerald were to reappear he would insist on her remaining until he could dress and attend her, she ordered the carriage and set out alone.

Her arrival was greeted by the duchess with the greatest pleasure, but she was not a person to consider that Agnes would require her care, even had the requirements of her other guests left her the power of bestowing her attention exclusively on her young friend; so, having chatted with her a few minutes, she left her to form her own circle, and mingled in the crowd.

Sir Mark Eveleen had never forgiven Agnes the mortification she had inflicted upon him at Dunmere Abbey, when he discovered that she had been laughing at him, while he had vainly imagined her to be quite afraid of him. A malevolent fool is the worst of all enemies, for he cannot foresee consequences, therefore he will revenge himself in any way that seems open to him, heedless of what he says or does. Such was Sir Mark Eveleen, and he was watching Agnes with no friendly eye, while surrounded by almost all whose notice was supposed to give consequence to a rising star.

The duchess had disappeared with a small group, whose taste she wished to consult on some improvements she was making in rather a retired part of the grounds, forming a kind of labyrinth, which was to be lighted up in the evening. There was a difference of opinion, and some one said they ought to consult Mrs. Longueville. The duchess immediately turned to the Marquis de Vilière, and asked him to fetch her. She described the place in which she had seen Agnes last, and sent a message to beg that she would join them, as they could not do without her. The marquis was but too ready to obey such commands, and started with an eager step to bear the message. Guided by the duchess's directions, he soon found the object of his search, and many eyes followed Agnes with admiration, as, accepting his offered arm, they moved off towards their fair hostess and her clique.

They were scarcely out of sight, when Gerald arrived, and encountered Sir Mark Eveleen, who accosted him with,—

"I suppose, Longueville, you are looking for your wife?"

Gerald, who was always afraid of his besetting sin making itself visible, and bringing down ridicule upon him, answered, carelessly,—

"I daresay if I were I should soon find her."

"I am doubtful of that," returned Sir Mark, with what he intended to be a very significant shake of the head, which irritated Gerald almost beyond endurance. He, however, restrained himself, and merely said,—

"Why so?"

"Because she is gone with de Vilière to the labyrinth, where people generally lose their way."

Though the words bore two meanings, there was not sufficient point in them to justify Gerald in knocking Sir Mark down, or by any other equally gentle method showing him that the stab had gone home; so he contented himself by mentally stigmatizing Sir Mark as a confoundedly insolent puppy, and turned silently from him.

He, however, was too much annoyed at Agnes's having exposed herself to such observations, or rather, he was too madly jealous, not to take the path to the labyrinth with so eager a step as to give full satisfaction to Sir Mark who stood looking after him with his usual inane smile, thinking to himself that he had done for Agnes this time, at least. The heat of the weather did not tend to cool the torrent of passion that was welling up from the deepest recesses of Gerald's heart, nor did an occasional glimpse which he obtained in the distance, of Agnes leaning on the marquis, contribute to slacken his pace, or restore to him the power of reflection. He rushed on the more rapidly, lest they should evade him in the labyrinth, as Sir Mark had maliciously insinuated.

But as they were only quietly wending their way

to the duchess's party, without a thought of escaping from him, he was not long in overtaking them. His eyes flashing fire, he addressed a few strong words to the marquis, which made him drop Agnes's hand from his arm, and reply in words as few, and as fiery. Agnes stood looking at them both in the greatest consternation, for the whole thing was so sudden, so unexpected; and as she was not accustomed to hear people dispute in French, she could only judge from the dark and angry expression of their faces that her husband and the marquis had quarrelled,—the actual words had not reached her apprehension.

Gerald drew her arm through his own, and they proceeded some paces before he could command his voice to ask her to return to the spot in the grounds where the marquée was erected. Her hand trembled as she leaned on him, which only strengthened him in his conviction that she had left the more frequented part of the pleasure-grounds to enjoy a solitary stroll with the marquis, and his blood boiled within him at the idea. Her voice was scarcely less trembling when she said that she was going to join the duchess, and that she thought his company would be equally acceptable, as it was to decide on a matter of taste that her opinion had been required.

We have said before that Gerald, notwithstanding his passionate love for Agnes, had never conceived an exalted opinion of her character, and his first impression now was that she was deceiving him, an impression which her terror greatly contributed to strengthen. But deep overpowering passion, such as Gerald was now the victim of, would have alarmed one much less easily terrified than Agnes.

Nothing like an explanation could take place in the

presence of the marquis; and, to the intense relief of all, they heard the voices of the group who were waiting for them, totally unconscious of the thunder-clouds that were rolling towards them in the shape of two angry men. Perhaps they might better be compared to two icebergs, from the sudden chill they appeared to communicate to the others when they joined them.

The marquis put his arm through that of one of the gentlemen, and drew him aside. After the lapse of a few minutes the pair walked off; and the charm of the duchess's manner once more warmed the remainder of the party into life, although she felt very uneasy, as she glanced from Agnes's pale cheeks and lips to Gerald's flushed forehead, where the swelled veins were standing out like ropes, and his dark eyes flashing fire, as if he would have annihilated everyone who came between him and the object of his wrath. Notwithstanding all her consummate tact, the duchess could not make the party amalgamate after the return of the marquis and his friend, though the former had apparently quite regained his composure since the *colloque* he had held with his companion, and was ready to join in the conversation. But Agnes looked so scared at his appearance that her hostess deemed it advisable to propose their all adjourning to the neighbourhood of the tents, where she knew, by the sound of the music, that dancing had commenced.

She hoped for a solution of the mystery from the marquis as soon as she could separate him from Gerald. But she found all her powers insufficient to unravel the secret, for much as the marquis admired her, and professed himself devoted to her service, he did not feel at all inclined to tell her that he had engaged a friend to carry a challenge to Gerald. Such an indis-

creet confidence would by no means tend to further his design of shooting Mr. Longueville through the heart, or—as his second had with difficulty persuaded him—through the knee, observing that the more fatal course of proceeding might render the marquis an object of odium to the English, and so react disagreeably on himself, especially just at the height of the season. Thus, at least, argued his discreet and highly-principled friend, who was well aware of the reputation enjoyed by the marquis as a practised shot, who could wing or kill his adversary at pleasure.

The whole enjoyment of the day was destroyed for poor Agnes, upon whose heart there had fallen a weight, that she could neither analyze nor shake off. She danced like the rest, but she could not divest herself of the feeling that Gerald's eyes were fixed upon her with a gaze that boded ill for her future happiness, and once more the long-stifled thought that she did not deserve that happiness, returned in full force upon her. Nor was she less wretched when she lost sight of him, for then the dread of his meeting the marquis again, and renewing the quarrel, deprived her of all power to finish the quadrille, which she had forced herself to commence, and she begged of her partner to take her to a seat. In a few minutes she saw Gerald emerge from behind a clump of evergreens, looking calmly, but so cold, so stern, that she scarcely recognized the expression of his face. He did not come near her, yet still his eyes remained fixed upon her; and, as if she had been fascinated by what so greatly terrified her, she could not help looking at him whenever she could do so without attracting the attention of those about her, with whom, woman-like, she tried to converse, in order to conceal, if possible, her agita-

tion. For a few minutes she was obliged to give her attention to an old lady, who was lecturing her on the evils of over excitement, and telling her, by way of illustrating her subject, that she was looking particularly fatigued, and ill. When Agnes again glanced towards Gerald, he had covered his face with his hand, as if he could no longer bear the joyous glare and apparent happiness that surrounded him. The thought struck her that he must be ill, and she was just meditating an escape from her companion, in order to ascertain whether her suspicions were well founded, when he slowly withdrew his hand, and his eyes met hers. But oh! how altered in expression was that deep melancholy gaze, mingled with unutterable love, with which he regarded her! She could bear it no longer, and rising, she made her way to him, and placing her arm within his, she begged of him to take her home. He pressed her hand as it rested upon his arm, and silently, but hastily, led her from the gay throng, as if he feared some attraction might still draw her away from him, and handed her into the carriage without even saying farewell to the duchess.

Agnes felt as if she were under a spell. The deep tenderness of Gerald's manner oppressed and frightened her, it was so different from what she had expected when they should next be alone together. But how far greater would have been her alarm, had she known that it all sprung from the anticipation that the last day he should ever pass with her was drawing to a close!

When he had disappeared during those few minutes from her sight, at the château, it was to receive a hostile message from the Marquis de Vilière, to meet him at St. Clouds the next morning.

He had drawn it on himself, and he could not escape from it.

The age of duelling had passed away in England; but he was now in France, and it was too late to remember that, as a caution against hasty insulting language. Few knew better than Gerald that a duellist is nothing less than a murderer, even if he did not actually kill his adversary, and that no murderer has everlasting life. He knew this, and yet never for a moment did he contemplate the idea of refusing the challenge of the marquis. The world's code had been too long his rule of life to be thrown down or trampled upon now; and his love for Agnes more than disputed possession of his mind with his awakened conscience, as he looked forward to the sudden termination of his earthly existence in his duel with de Vilière. The possibility of his being the survivor never occurred to him, and when Agnes, complaining of headache, proposed to retire early, he felt a sudden pang, as if the moment of parting for ever had arrived, and he believed that loss of life itself was not to be compared to the agony of that parting.

When she had gone to her room, he thought that he had, or at least that he ought to have, a great deal of business to transact; but a note containing an earnest appeal to Monmouth, to take charge of and watch over his young widow, was all he could bring himself to do; and hour after hour he sat leaning his head on his hand, thinking of her, as she would be left in such a place as Paris, without a protector who had a right to guard and guide her.

At last he took up a pen to write to her, but, after a vain attempt, he threw it down, and rising, stole to her bedside, once more to look on that face so idolized by him.

Agnes had remained long awake, but now was sleeping with all the careless grace and beauty of an infant. Her arm was thrown on the outside of the bed, as if her first slumber had been troubled, and as he bent over her, he could scarcely refrain from pressing his lips on her downy cheek, so like a summer peach. Long and silently he gazed upon her, and who can tell the agony that pressed upon his heart in that still hour?

The clock struck four—he must go. He stole from the room like a guilty thing, dreading lest the least noise should arouse her. He must go—he could not even pray for her. How could a murderer pray? As he prepared to leave the house, he felt so completely unmanned that he turned back again, and, with a feeling of self-contempt, poured out a large glass of wine, and drained it with a trembling hand. The fresh air did more to brace his nerves than anything else could have effected, although it was not a morning calculated to raise the spirits, or impart courage, if he had required it. He drove quickly, and soon regained sufficient command over himself to converse with his friend, who, if judged by the outward seeming, might be taken for the principal rather than the second. The marquis, being a professed duellist, it was a most unpleasant office for any one to play the part of second to his adversary.

Gerald was a brave man, but even a brave man does not feel that excitement when about to fight a duel that the martial preparations for a battle almost invariably inspire; there was, moreover, wanting that sense of right which makes difficult things easy.

The weather, too, was lowering, and might well have weighed down a spirit less self-absorbed than Gerald's,

for the hot wind, like a sirocco, blew across their path, and all around rose piles of thunder-clouds; but they were unheeded by him. The time was given to stern reflection, and when they reached the ground, he felt much more inclined to quarrel with himself than with his opponent; and accordingly, after the customary salutation, he took the place assigned him by his second with a degree of gentlemanly coolness that greatly raised him in the estimation of the marquis. Could he have seen into Gerald's heart, his admiration would have been materially diminished, for de Vilière had often been out before, and this was the first time that Gerald had played the game of honourable murder; nor was he an infidel. It is, therefore, better not to withdraw the stern veil of coldness that concealed his remorse.

It was not his intention to fire at the marquis, nor was it the marquis's intention to kill him; but who can rush into the middle of a rapid river, and not be carried onward by the current? Who can say in an evil course, "So far will I go, and no farther?" Gerald fired (as he thought) into the air, and wounded M de Vilière in the face. The next instant he received his adversary's bullet through his own heart. He bounded from the ground, and then fell back perfectly still, but without any apparent wound. Not a moment had been given him to speak, or even to think. The surgeon immediately perceived that life was extinct, and that the marquis's case was serious enough to require all his care.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHILE these events were passing, Agnes was sleeping calmly, unconscious of all the evils that hung suspended over her. She was startled from this sweet repose, and sweeter dreams of home and early youth, by the sound of heavy footsteps passing her door, followed by subdued murmurs. She rang, but her maid not appearing directly on the summons, she rose, and throwing on her dressing-gown, opened the door of her room, just as the men who had carried her husband's body from the carriage came out of the opposite one. As if the whole scene had passed before her, like a flash of lightning, the truth rushed on her mind. Motionless with horror, she stood gazing at all that was going on, without the power of asking if her worst fears were realized, and, indeed, without the power of distinguishing one person from another.

A gentle arm was placed round her, and she was led back unresistingly to her room. She looked wildly up into the face of the person who was supporting her; but without recognising it, even though that face was Monmouth's. Pale as marble, and trembling from suppressed emotion, he held her as if he feared she might faint; but she was just then the stronger of the two, and better would it have been for both had faintness overpowered her. The colour returned vividly to her cheek and an unnatural lustre to her eyes. A

loud unearthly burst of laughter escaped from her lips, thrilling Monmouth with horror, as peal after peal rang through the room. At last she turned to Monmouth, and said,—

"Oh! Gerald, I am so glad you have come back. Do you know, I have had a frightful dream; but it is all gone now;" and she laughed a low, soft laugh, that was more appalling to hear than her first outbreak.

The doctor, whom Monmouth had sent for, in the faint hope that life was not quite extinct in his brother, now arrived, and finding that Agnes's brain had quite given way, he advised Monmouth to take her into the room where her husband's body lay, in the hope that a second shock might recall the wandering intellect the first had driven away. The trial only changed the current of her madness. Forgetting that she had just before believed Monmouth to be her husband, at the sight of Gerald's corpse lying on the bed she raised her finger, and in a soft voice murmured,—

"Hush! I am so glad he is asleep; we must not disturb him."

She tried to push Monmouth out of the room, but he said,—

"No, dear Agnes, we must watch together."

As he said this, she looked at him earnestly, as if struggling to regain the lost powers of her mind; but the feeble thread snapped again, for another peal of laughter resounded through the chamber of death, which was as suddenly stilled by a glance at the calm still features of Gerald; and flinging herself upon the cold clay of one whom she had never loved in life, scream succeeded scream, until, perfectly exhausted, she was carried in a state of insensibility to bed,

where she only woke to the wild delirium of a brain fever. Monmouth, though in the deepest grief for his brother, whom he had loved so well, gave himself up to watching over the fate of her whom that brother had prized so dearly, and whom Monmouth so justly suspected to have been the cause of his death. Gerald's note was written in all the agony of spirit that he was actually feeling, and Monmouth, acknowledging the sacredness of the trust that had been reposed in him, determined not to leave Agnes for a moment, until he could resign his place to her mother. He wrote to his father, enclosing the letter to Mr. Percival, and requesting him to take it himself to the Abbey, and prepare Mr. Longueville before delivering it to him; and also to break, as gently as possible, to Mrs. Egerton and Grace the state Agnes was in, and the absolute necessity that existed for her mother to join her immediately.

CHAPTER XX.

It was a fine sunny day at Roseneath, such as not unfrequently comes to cheer us in the early part of the winter, and which, in a warm southern aspect like that of Roseneath, is most truly enjoyable. So at least Grace found it, and, to admit the sunshine and the balmy air, she had opened the window of the morning room in which she was sitting. The very window through which Ethel had stepped, the day her unfortunate speech had caused Grace such misery. Grace had that morning received from Ethel a beautiful bouquet of hot-house flowers, and she was seated at that most luxurious of all luxurious employments, the arranging them in one of her choicest vases. She had just completed her pleasant task, and was bending over them to inhale their delicious perfume, when a slight noise made her turn her head, and she found Mr. Percival standing by her side. He had entered, almost noiselessly, by the window through which he had seen Grace as he was about to pass it.

She did not start, she did not blush, for at the first glance she had detected, by the expression of his countenance, that something had occurred to move him deeply. Mechanically she gave him her hand, while her eyes remained rivetted on his, as if to read his thoughts. He held her hand, while he said, in a tone of deep emotion which he vainly strove to repress,—

"I have had a letter from Monmouth."

Almost breathlessly, Grace exclaimed,—

"Agnes!"

"It was not of her I wished to speak just at present," he answered; "it is of Gerald. You never loved him, Grace, but his fate is dreadful, even for a stranger to think of."

He paused, as if he would not utter the fatal words, and Grace ejaculated,—

"Oh! tell me. This suspense is too much."

He sank his voice nearly to a whisper, as he added,—

"He has been killed in a duel with the Marquis de Vilière."

Grace turned deadly pale, and merely uttered the single word,—

"Why?"

The same question had been in Mr. Percival's mind when he had first read Monmouth's letter, but he could not answer it, as Monmouth had not entered into any particulars, nor would he have told the cause even had he been better informed on the subject than he was at the time of his writing, so Mr. Percival could but shake his head mournfully, and proceed to inform her of Agnes's illness, and of Monmouth's wish that Mrs. Egerton would go to Paris to take charge of her.

Agnes's illness, under any circumstances, would have alarmed and grieved Grace; but its cause and nature convinced her of the correctness of her first surmise, that the duel must have been brought about by some indiscretion on her sister's part. Monmouth had not in his letter mentioned the danger apprehended by the physician, that Agnes's intellect would

never recover the shock it had sustained. He hoped against hope, that the mother's care might work wonders; and he counted the hours until he might expect her.

Mrs. Egerton was dreadfully alarmed, but, like most gentle people, she retained her firmness, and instantly prepared for her departure, destined not to take place, however, until the next day; and though at first she resisted Grace's entreaties to be allowed to accompany her, she ended by yielding to the force of her daughter's persuasions.

Grace's motive for so earnestly desiring to go to Paris was twofold: both in order to assist her mother in the cares and anxieties of nursing Agnes, and also that she might not be subject to the risk of constantly encountering Mr. Percival, which would of course be the case were she left at Roseneath. The last hour had brought with it a grief, which she could not share with any one. Never had it struck Grace that the attack of Agnes could be dangerous, for she knew too well how little she had loved her husband; and, judging from her own feelings, she believed that Agnes must have been much more deeply attached to Mr. Percival than even she herself had been, and that though her sister's attachment might be supposed to have been wholly eradicated, it would most certainly spring afresh in her mind if Mr. Percival renewed his attentions. With a sensation of anguish, for which she thoroughly despised herself, she thought, now that Gerald was removed, Mr. Percival must return to his first passionate love for Agnes, that the latter must regain her once powerful influence over him. Grace lowered her head with a sense both of degradation and of desolation as these ideas passed through her

mind; for she had but little hope that Mr. Percival had not discovered her affection for him. Instead of being the useful kind assistant of her mother, as she had ever been, even from her childhood, she sat on listlessly in the spot where Mr. Percival had so unexpectedly stood beside her. She heeded not the lapse of time, as, leaning on the table, her hands covering her face, she had not moved, though Mrs. Egerton had come more than once into the room,—as noiselessly as possible, it is true, for she considered it was the poor child's first sorrow, and that it was better not to disturb her.

There was another step, however, that had the power to rouse her, and as she started from her seat, it was with a look of actual terror that she saw the door open and Mr. Percival reappear. The colour had completely faded from her cheek when he took her hand. She would have withdrawn it, and averted her face from his gaze; but he retained it by a gentle force, and said,—

"You are not well. I should have been more considerate in telling you of Agnes this morning. You are not strong enough to go to her."

"I am quite well, I am quite strong," she replied, in a cold tone; and releasing her hand, she rose to leave the room. Anything rather than endure the soft gaze of those deep eyes, so earnest, so searching, that she feared she could not prevent his reading her inmost thoughts.

"Grace," said he, following her to the door, "I came here to speak to you, to see you perhaps for the last time. Will you not listen to me?"

She turned to him as he spoke, but looked up as if she were undecided whether to fly or stand her ground.

He did not give her time to make up her mind on the subject, even if she had had the power, for he led her back, gently but firmly, to her seat, and stood before her. A few seconds, which appeared to her interminable, elapsed before he could summon courage to resume; then, in a low voice, he said,—

"Grace, I have scarcely a right to hope that you should believe me, when I say that I love you as I never loved another; and that I cannot let you leave me without at least telling you so, though I may not have chosen a moment when you would be disposed—but no, if you love me, as I love you, there is no moment in which you would not listen to me. Oh, Grace! are you listening to me favourably! or are you indeed as cold as you seem!"

Up to this point Grace had indeed appeared to listen with a coldness that was turning her into stone; but at such an imputation cast upon her by the only man she had ever loved, the blood rushed to her brow, she bent her head to conceal her face from him, remained perfectly still, with her hand clasped, as if to crush down some over-powering feeling. He stood looking at her, and though hope in some degree revived, he could not understand her in the least, and he dared not repeat his petition for an answer.

At last the courage she had been struggling for came to her aid. She turned towards him, and said,—

"Mr. Percival, I might feign not to understand what you allude to; but,"—she hesitated an instant, and then continued,—"I wish to be explicit, for your happiness depends on my being so. You think now that you love me—" He made a movement of impatience as if he were about to interrupt her, but she lifted her hand, as if imploring him to be silent, and continued,

"You believe it now, but I have always heard that men, unlike women, can deceive themselves in these matters,"—she spoke quickly, almost inarticulately,—"and that when they meet again the girl they first loved, their whole heart returns to her."

"I can well believe it," he replied, with a calmness in strong contrast to Grace's extreme agitation, "but I never loved Agnes."

She started from her seat, and stepping back, looked with as severe an expression as her soft features could assume, which, however, almost instantly gave way to one of inquiring astonishment, for she could as soon have doubted her own truth as his; so she concluded that she did not rightly comprehend him. Replying to her look, he repeated,—

"Yes, I never loved her." He stopped, for Grace became so deadly pale, that he fancied she was about to faint. He attempted to support her, but she waved him off, and, clasping her hands, she exclaimed with vehemence,—

"Oh this! this I cannot bear!"

"You don't understand me," he eagerly broke in. "I never did love Agnes, though I idolized her beauty. You cannot understand this, dear Grace. You cannot understand a man's feelings in such a matter; but it is the truth. I love you, dearest, and I never knew what love was till I woke from my dream of idolatry. A thousand times since I became attached to you I have been thankful that my wishes were not granted. Believe me, such a chain as that once broken can never be reunited.

Grace breathed again. The weight was taken from her heart; but though she believed him to be guiltless of any intentional deception, she still thought he was

deceiving himself; she therefore remained steadfast to her purpose, and said,—

"Will you grant me one request?"

"Oh! anything—anything," he exclaimed, joyfully.

"Will you feel yourself perfectly free, until Agnes has been at home with us for three months?"

All joy vanished from his countenance, and, in a tone of sorrow so deep as to touch the very depths of poor Grace's heart, he asked,—

"Will you, then, leave me without a single hope? Do you wish me not even to think of you, while you are away? Oh, Grace, you know that is impossible, I cannot give you such a promise."

"It is quite the same," she answered. "I will consider you free until you have been tried by constant intercourse with Agnes. Perhaps," she continued, thinking deeply, "I should have at once refused your offered affection; but I cannot do so, for I value your happiness above my own."

"Dearest Grace, I am unworthy of such a heart; but believe me mine is all, all your own."

"I must not listen to you any longer," she exclaimed. "I must go." She extended her hand, but she could not again encounter that saddened face, and left the room in silence. Grace's character, though gentle, and quiet in the extreme, was concentrated to a remarkable degree. She loved Mr. Percival with an intensity that had deepened with every year of her life; but it was a love so essentially unselfish, that she would at any period have sacrificed her own happiness to have secured his. She would rather a thousand times have seen him married to Agnes, with the hope that he might obtain real happiness, than blindly accept his offered affection, with the most distant fear that

he should, if but for a moment, consider that he had been hasty in his choice.

The sacrifice she had just made did not bring her that satisfaction, or at least that peace, which she had reckoned on, nor could she even hope that it would be the means of securing to Mr. Percival and her sister that complete felicity she ardently desired for both. She felt that they were not one in opinion or religious feeling, that Agnes, until really changed, would indeed be an unfit wife for such a man as Mr. Percival. Yet neither could she recall her share in the conversation she had held with him. She was sure that if she were again placed in the same position she should act just as she had done. She was herself deeply religious; but, strange to say, her religion could not give her much comfort when she thought that all was now over, that nothing lay before her but the cold, blank realities of life, and that, though she told herself that the Christian could never be unhappy, she could derive no joy from what she had done but such as arose from the feeling that she had acted rightly. Had she ever done anything to cause remorse she might well have acknowledged that her present state was most enviable compared to it; but as that had never been the case, she was well-nigh overpowered. She roused herself from such reflections, which she knew to be wrong, and to prevent their recurrence she tried to busy herself with preparations for her journey.

A sad journey it was for both; and Mrs. Egerton, on her arrival, required scarcely less care than Agnes.

The days and weeks seemed to wear hopelessly on, to all parties. Agnes's constitution overcame the strength of the fever; but she recovered but to very

doubtful intelligence. She never spoke of Gerald to her mother. How much or how little of past events she recollected, none could tell.

For hours she would sit with her large eyes fixed on vacancy; nor did she allow any clue to her thoughts to escape her. No entreaties could induce her to go out, not even the orders of her physician, who said that air and exercise were alone necessary to complete her cure, on which he appeared to pride himself in no small degree. Mrs. Egerton, who knew Agnes's character, could not believe that she had really regained the powers of her mind, though, to any questions put to her, she answered quite rationally; but still with that unnatural quietude, or rather apathy, so foreign to her old temperament as to cause the greatest anxiety to her mother. Mrs. Egerton was also very uneasy about Grace, who had become so pale and thin as to give the idea that she was gradually, though without any disease, fading away. She was still the same gentle cheerful girl she had ever been, yet Mrs. Egerton became convinced that there was more on her mind than Agnes's illness; but as Grace never complained, Mrs. Egerton did not like to speak to her on the subject.

Had Grace's unhappy attachment not been attended with such complications, she would not have hesitated to confide in her gentle mother, whom she loved with all a child's devotedness. But the fear of making her more miserable than she was already, decided Grace on not enlightening her. She dreaded yet longed to go home, where she knew that certainty at least awaited her. Agnes's state of mind did not appear so unnatural to her as to her mother; for she had not a doubt, from what she had gathered from Monmouth, of the duel

having been in some way the result of Agnes's own imprudence. Grace could, therefore, well account for Agnes's silence, even to her mother, on the subject of Gerald's death; but she fancied her sister's remorse might be lessened if she could be induced to return to Roseneath.

The two sisters were one day sitting together, a rare occurrence, for Mrs. Egerton was so watchful over them as scarcely ever to absent herself. The opportunity that Grace had lately so much wished for she now determined to make use of in order to bring about some explanation with Agnes on the matter of her going home, and her reasons for so very much disliking the idea. After a short silence, during which she was thinking in what way she could most naturally introduce the topic that so occupied her mind, Grace broke ground by saying,—

"Agnes, dear, are you not tired of this dreary place?"

Poor Grace had but little reason to look favourably on the brilliant beauties of Paris, that had so delighted Agnes on her first coming there.

"Dreary!" repeated Agnes, in a low sweet voice; "is it dreary?"

"I think it must be even more so for you than for me. Do you never wish to be at home again, Agnes?"

A cold shudder seemed to creep through Agnes's frame, as she answered,—

"I have no home, Grace; I may never have a home again on earth."

"You must not say that, dearest. I am sure you are well enough to travel; and if we had you once back at Roseneath, you would soon be quite well again."

It was seldom that Agnes, since her affliction, had looked at any one when she spoke to them; but she

now lifted her eyes to her sister's face, with a wondering gaze, which Grace was glad to see—though she could not understand it—for it displayed some sort of interest in what was going on.

"You don't understand me, Grace, and I wish you could, without my speaking more plainly. Nothing shall induce me to leave Paris before March. If I die then—as die I shall—I wish to be buried here."

She spoke wildly, almost sternly. Grace could scarcely become paler than she had been at the beginning of the conversation; but her eyes dilated, and though her lips parted, no sound came. She held out her arms to Agnes, who rose quietly and composedly from her seat, and went to her sister. It was perhaps the best thing that could have happened to her, to be obliged to administer comfort instead of receiving it. She said,—

"Do not grieve for me, dear Grace. I have never been happy, and now life would be much worse than a blank to me, for it would be a life of remorse. I cannot speak to my mother, Grace, for it would break her heart; but when it is all over, dear, you will tell her how little I desired to live, though it is sometimes half maddening to think of standing before the judgment-seat a murderer.

She hid her face and shuddered. Grace's faculties returned, though with a thrill of horror; but she had been long accustomed to rule her own spirit in her intercourse with Agnes, and she soon calmed herself sufficiently to say,—

"There can be no murder without the will; and even were it so, which your own conscience you know tells you it was not, there would still be a door open for real repentance; the blood of Christ cleanseth from

all sin. We have each one sins enough to make us dread the judgment, if we had not a mediator; but you have no more the sin of murder on your soul than I have; and you ought not to endanger your life by encouraging such thoughts."

"Oh Grace! Grace! if you knew all you would not judge me so leniently. I ought to have known him better."

A convulsion passed over her face while she spoke, that frightened Grace, but, with her usual good sense, she conceived that it would be better—painful though it was—for Agnes to speak on a subject that was evidently never far from her thoughts. She therefore resumed the conversation, by saying,—

"Agnes, I am quite sure you never gave Gerald real cause for complaint."

"Stop—stop!" exclaimed Agnes, in a tone of agony; if you knew how that name pierces my heart, you would spare me, though I do not deserve it."

She sank half kneeling on the ground, and throwing her arm over the chair, she buried her face upon it.

Grace bent on her knees beside her, half to raise, half to comfort her, and said,—

"Let us pray."

Long they knelt, while Grace poured forth her whole soul in prayer; and when they rose, Agnes threw herself into Grace's arms, and pressed her to her bosom. But Grace would have felt more comfort could she have seen anything like moisture in her sister's eyes, which no tear had softened since Gerald's death.

This conversation, unsatisfactory as it was to Grace, appeared in some measure to have brought Agnes back to real life; and, much to Mrs. Egerton's and Grace's

relief, she no longer refused to drive out, though even when she did, she never recognized any one who passed. Her friend, the Duchess of Tyne, was constant in her inquiries and wishes to be admitted, but Agnes could not be prevailed on to see her. Her name seemed to have the effect of recalling to memory all the overwhelming misery that had so completely prostrated her. Grace had observed this, and at last she not only ceased to speak of the duchess, but she never allowed her card to be brought into the room where Agnes was. By degrees Agnes was becoming more alive to the persons and things around her; but, most unfortunately, one day, driving in the Champs Elysées, Agnes suddenly caught Grace's arm, and closed her eyes with a shudder. It was in vain that Grace asked the cause of her alarm, she could not get Agnes to utter a word, but,—

"Take me home," while she lay back in the carriage, trembling in every limb. Grace could not at all understand her sister's emotion; for she had only seen a phaeton pass by, driven by a lady she did not know; but that lady was the Duchess of Tyne, whom Agnes had recognized; and with the recognition came the remembrance of that last dreadful day with Gerald, and all its direful consequences. From that time she could not be prevailed upon to go out, nor could Grace or her mother discover the reason for her persistent refusal to do so.

A close correspondence was kept up between Ethel and Grace; but as Ethel was determined that Grace should not forget Mr. Percival, she always contrived, if possible, to send her some information as to his sayings and doings, which brought the flush to Grace's pale cheek, and prevented her showing those letters to her

mother. The month wore heavily on, but March came at last, the period so dreaded by Grace, since her conversation with Agnes. It came and went, and Agnes did not die, nothwithstanding her strong conviction that she should do so.

For the first time since the loss of her husband she melted into tears, when her mother gave her baby into her arms; but as he lay beside her, the waxen image of his father, the long pent-up sorrow welled forth in such floods that her terrified mother was obliged to carry off the boy; and the nurse prognosticated all sorts of evils, none of which, however, came to pass; for, though during several days Agnes could not look on her baby without tears, they had a salutary instead of a hurtful effect upon her, and she rapidly recovered, not only her health and strength, but her beauty also. She was now as anxious to leave Paris as she had been before to remain there; but she could not move her baby until it was strong enough to bear travelling without risk. However, she awaited the time most impatiently, for her whole object now appeared to be the disseverance of every link that could unite her to the past. And again she was an enigma to Grace. Although her child was now her idol—the centre to which all her ambition turned—yet Grace could not but wonder that the infant never seemed to recall the father to the memory of the young mother. The higher Agnes's spirits rose, the more Grace's drooped; and she became nervous to that degree, that a snatch of some old song with which Agnes would lull the baby to sleep would send her to her room, where she would cry as if she were another Niobe; and she looked so wretched when she rejoined Mrs. Egerton and Agnes, that the former urged the latter to leave France,

and even thought of taking Grace home and leaving Agnes in Paris to follow them at her own pleasure. But this idea Grace persuaded her mother to renounce, for she knew Agnes better than Mrs. Egerton did; and she dreaded leaving her alone, lest she should again be tempted to mix in that society she had so lately delighted in; for Mrs. Gerald Longueville was not a person to be restrained by the forms of the world, of which, indeed, she was most supremely ignorant. And if she, in her state of recovered spirits, had wished to go into company, she would never have reflected on the possible loss of her good name by doing so, at such an early stage of her widowhood. It was therefore decided by Grace—much against Mrs. Egerton's wish—that they should remain until Agnes pronounced the child old enough to bear the going to England.

CHAPTER XXI.

GREAT was Lady Augusta's dismay at the birth of an heir to the domains of Dunmere, and, if the truth must be told, there was more sympathy on the subject between her and Ethel than had ever existed before, though they both, for private reasons of their own, kept their feelings to themselves. Ethel did not long grieve for Gerald, who had never been a favourite of hers. At first, it is true, her sorrow was great for Monmouth's loss of a brother whom he loved so well; but when that had passed away, she began to think of him as the heir of Dunmere. Not that Ethel cared for his fortune, only in so far as it left him at liberty to act on his own principles; and she now expected from week to week to hear in some of his letters to her, which still continued to arrive with the same constant punctuality, that he was about to return to gladden her eyes and her heart. Sore, therefore, was the disappointment at the birth of the heir, to every one but his mother. Even Mrs. Egerton did not wish for a grandchild so closely connected with Dunmere, though there are few who would not have hailed the event with as much pride as pleasure. Time rolled on, and the precious little son was pronounced strong enough to be introduced to the land of his fathers.

In June, the same month in which Agnes had left Roseneath a grieving bride, she returned to it a widow, though scarcely a grieving one.

Not only all her remorse, but almost all her griefs, were swallowed up in her idolatry of her child, who, though he had not retained the strong likeness to his father which had been at first so remarkable, was really a most lovely boy.

When the party arrived at Roseneath, where Agnes had expressed her determination to remain, she was in all her dazzling loveliness, as if no storm had passed over her head, and bowed her for a while to the earth.

Grace, at the same time, was but the shadow of her former self. But what she had lost in health she had gained in beauty. The expression of her face was almost angelic; and though Mr. Percival was startled and shocked at her fragile appearance,—when he came the day after their return to welcome them home,—yet, being a mortal man, it was not without a selfish feeling of pleasure that he thought her delicacy might possibly be attributed to anxiety, in which he might have a share. But three months would soon pass, and then he should see her, his own blooming Grace, happier and more lovely than ever.

The meeting between him and Agnes was rather awkward, for having heard so much of her sorrow at first, he had conceived an idea of a half-brokenhearted widow, which, to his astonishment, was quickly dispelled by the sight of Agnes in all her youthful vivid beauty. Nor could he in any way forgive her for her seeming heartlessness, until she brought down her pretty baby, with all a young mother's pride, to show him. Grace watched the meeting, and being predetermined that Mr. Percival must yield to the fascinations of her sister, she interpreted his evidently startled look—in reality one of surprise—into one of admiration. Such a conviction did not assist her in

recovering either her health or her spirits; and she most sedulously avoided allowing him the opportunity of undeceiving her. She scarcely ever appeared when he called, for though she tried to persuade herself that she ought to be glad, it was more than poor human nature could succeed in doing, and it seemed very likely that Grace's life would be the sacrifice, for, far from gaining from her native air all that the Paris physicians had promised her, she was evidently declining from day to day.

And what were Agnes's thoughts on the subject of Mr. Percival? for thoughts she undoubtedly had, her nature being essentially coquettish. She had never loved Gerald, and the reaction from the depth of misery and remorse in which she had been plunged for so many months, inclined her the more easily to fall back into her old habits. Be it also remembered that she had no idea of the existence of anything more than friendly affection between Mr. Percival and Grace; and that all the love she had ever felt for any man had been given to him in her girlish days, though her short married career had been untainted by a thought that could have made Gerald jealous. She had seen many men during her stay in Paris, who were admired by all the world around her, but there was not one amongst them all that could for a moment bear comparison with Mr. Percival; and if Agnes had been free, there was not one of them who could have gained the power over her that he had once possessed. On meeting him again, she could not but feel his superiority. Agnes had high intellectual endowments, and would have had a superior mind, if it had not been marred by early association with girls of an inferior stamp. Most of the faults of her character might be traced to

this association; and now the temptation to try and regain, if possible, her ascendancy over Mr. Percival was irresistible. He had not forgotten the last scene between them, before his departure from England; and could she have known the impression now produced on him after her long absence—the thorough contempt he felt for her—she would scarcely have had much hope of succeeding in her half-formed design.

He soon felt inclined to quarrel even with her love for her baby. Pride was so evidently mixed up with her affection for the little heir of Dunmere, that if it had not been for the depth of his own attachment for Grace, he would have shown the contempt he felt for her sister. And well was it for him that he had the safeguard of that engrossing attachment, for few men, without such a panoply, could have resisted the indescribable charm with which Agnes was endowed, so that in all probability he would have once more fallen a victim to the enchantments of this Circe.

Some weeks had passed during the progress of this by-play, which was all unnoticed by Mr. Percival, he being too painfully occupied in watching Grace to pay much attention to anything that concerned Agnes.

One day Agnes, happening to come into the room when Ethel Gordon and Grace were sitting together on the sofa, exclaimed,—

"What are you two moping about?"

Grace started up without answering, and turned her face to the window to hide the traces of tears, that were but too visible to display it to the scrutinizing glances of Agnes.

Ethel was hardly open to the charge of moping, for the colour had deepened in her cheek, and she had

evidently been much excited by the conversation that had been passing. She replied,—

"If you had come a few minutes sooner, you could not have accused us of moping, for I had almost quarrelled with Grace."

Grace threw a look of entreaty at Ethel, who continued,—

"Yes, Grace, you are ruining your own happiness, and the happiness of all around you, by your false delicacy, which I call folly."

"I hate mysteries," said Agnes, in a piqued tone; "and I think, Ethel, you appear to take especial pleasure in them of late."

"I quite agree with you in your opinion, though I cannot plead guilty to your accusation, Agnes; it is on that very subject that I have been lecturing Grace."

"Surely you cannot mean to say that Grace has any mysteries with me!" interposed Agnes, in a startled tone of voice, and a sudden flush rising into her face.

Grace's tears dried on her burning cheek, as she turned and looked at Agnes. Ethel rose, and passing her arm round Grace, said,—

"Dearest Grace, I am going to leave you, in the hope that you will tell Agnes what we have been talking about; believe me, you are both in a false position, and you will have much cause for regret if you do not act openly with Agnes; I am a spectator, and my judgment in the matter is clearer than yours."

"Impossible! impossible! Ethel; I cannot do it."

Ethel kissed her forehead, and said,—

"You ought to do it, Grace, for you are killing yourself. Agnes, you ought to see what I mean as well as I can. Grace will not allow me to speak more plainly. Good-bye."

And thus saying, she left the room, in the hope that the sisters, when alone, must confide in each other; but Agnes was not inclined to seek a solution of the mystery from Grace, for a cold chill had crept over her while Ethel had been speaking, and she remarked, in rather a chilly tone,—

"Do not deem it necessary to tell me anything, Grace, merely because Ethel Gordon imagines it to be right. I think you are a much better judge of your own affairs than she can be."

"You must not suppose, dear Agnes, that my want of confidence proceeds from coldness to you; believe me, I consult your happiness as well as my own by remaining silent."

"I believe you, dearest Grace," said Agnes, with a sense of relief at this decision, "so let us not think anything more about it."

She left the room, as if to prevent any further conversation. Going upstairs she met the nurse with her baby. The little thing extended its arms, sure of being taken by its mama; but she only kissed him and passed on. When she reached her room she locked the door, and then sitting down, she endeavoured to disentangle her ideas. She tried to remember what had been said to make her conclude that Mr. Percival had been the subject of conversation between Grace and Ethel. She could not recall a single word that even implied it, and yet she had not a doubt on her mind that it was the truth. A shiver passed through her frame, and starting up, she uttered,—

"Impossible! impossible!" But the more impossible she wished to think it, the more possible did it appear to her. One little circumstance after another

rose before her, which to an unprejudiced person would have carried conviction; but Agnes was not unprejudiced, her passions were all enlisted against that disinterested feeling so necessary for the formation of a sound judgment. She was vain, but, independently of her vanity, she loved Mr. Percival again, with a far greater depth of affection than she had ever before experienced for him. It is true that her husband had not yet been a year dead; but then she remembered the passionate love Mr. Percival had professed for her scarcely more than twelve months since. She could not but also recall to mind how very badly she had treated him, and therefore she not unnaturally interpreted the kindness of his manner to her since her return to Roseneath as a sign that the adoration with which he had formerly regarded her was not so utterly annihilated as his threats of its speedy extinction might have led her to suppose. Had she understood his character better, she would have seen plainly, by that very kindness of manner, how completely the chain had been broken. Though his friendliness had never changed to anything like coldness, it had never increased to anything like warmth. His attentions to her were always those of a friend; but even with all her wish to give them another name, she could not do so; yet for this she had a ready excuse in her recent widowhood, and she called it his self-command. It was perfect agony to her to think that the heart once absolutely her own had been transferred to another; but that that other should be her own sister, was almost maddening; as she reflected how impossible it would be to bear the sight of a happiness that might have been, and yet never could be, hers. All her passionate nature rebelled against the idea, and totally

setting aside the anticipation, or, rather, never considering, that the consummation of her desires must bring misery upon Grace, she persisted in resisting conviction.

While she was pacing her chamber, with heightened colour and flashing eyes, a servant came to tell her that Lady Augusta Longueville was in the drawing-room.

Between these two had always existed a dislike, amounting almost to antipathy, and this was only the second visit Lady Augusta had paid at Roseneath since her daughter-in-law's return, nearly three months before. She had come once to see her grandson; but as she professed to dislike all children, the little fellow found no favour in her sight. She was not slow in concluding that what she had heard of Mrs. Gerald Longueville's absorbing sorrow for her husband must have been an exaggeration. A larger share of charity than the elder lady had ever possessed might well have been required to believe that Agnes was in reality a deep mourner, appearing, as she did, in all the freshness of her youthful beauty, and the fascination of her playful manners. Lady Augusta's prejudices had been gaining ground in the course of the aforesaid three months; for being as much addicted to listening to the country gossip as she had been when we first presented her to the reader, she had not failed to hear the remarks that had been current on the constant visits of Mr. Percival to Roseneath, where the young and lovely widow was averred to be his attraction; the good gossips quite overlooking the circumstance of his visits to the cottage never having been discontinued.

Lady Augusta, though not caring in the least for

Agnes, still thought it beneath the dignity of her son's widow marrying a clergyman, and she was more justly scandalized at the want of decorum which Agnes must have exhibited, when the probability of such an event could have become the topic of comment and speculation in the neighbourhood.

Lady Augusta was not a person in any way fitted for the office she had taken upon herself—that of reprover to her daughter-in-law—particularly as she felt in no small degree afraid of Agnes, who never spared her when their wits came in contact.

After a few haughty sentences had been exchanged between them, there ensued a pause, during which Agnes's thoughts had wandered back to the subject on which they had been engaged, in the stormy *colloque* she had held with herself in the solitude of her own room, which Lady Augusta's arrival had interrupted. The pause was broken by Lady Augusta clearing her throat in that ominous way which implies a want of courage to bring forward the matter that is uppermost in the mind of the person about to speak. She then said,—

"I passed Mr. Percival in the park; has he been here?"

This was addressed to Agnes. The sudden mention of his name, added to Lady Augusta's full gaze, or rather stare, brought the bright blood mantling to Agnes's cheek, and turning from those large haughty eyes, she asked her sister,—

"Has Mr. Percival been here, Grace?"

If the colour had risen to Agnes's cheek, it was more than reflected in Grace's. She blushed scarlet to the roots of her hair, as she answered, almost with hesitation, by the single monosyllable, "Yes."

This had a magic effect on Agnes. Every tinge of the brilliant red, which a moment before had so much annoyed her while under the scrutiny of Lady Augusta, faded away. Lady Augusta glanced from one to the other, in something like astonishment, as she said,—

"Mr. Percival's name has had such an extraordinary effect that I can scarcely hope for a contradiction of the unpleasant reports, which, I must say, until now I did not believe."

Agnes was no longer pale, as she turned her flashing eyes on her mother-in-law, and retorted,—

"At Roseneath we do not hear the village gossip, therefore I am afraid, if you wish for a contradiction of the reports that have so strangely annoyed you, you will be obliged to let us know what they are."

This was carrying the war rather more into her territories than Lady Augusta had expected; but she was quite as ready to do battle as her daughter-in-law, so she quickly retaliated,—

"I had hoped I might have been spared the repetition; but since you do not or will not understand me, I must be more explicit. I have been told that Mr. Percival's constant visits at Roseneath are paid to you, my daughter-in-law."

"If I lived alone at Roseneath, so I should conclude," said Agnes, with as much coolness as if she had never blushed in her life.

"Then I presume, if such were the case, you would not disapprove of these visits."

"That would indeed be a presumption," replied Agnes, with a slight smile curling her lip.

It was now Lady Augusta's turn to redden, but with anger, as she perceived the impossibility of making the desired effect on Agnes.

"I would wish to have a plain answer, Mrs. Gerald Longueville," she continued, majestically.

"A plain answer to what, Lady Augusta," inquired Agnes, with the most perfect self-possession.

"I wish to be informed whether or not you approve of Mr. Percival's visits to Roseneath.

"Most certainly I do," was Agnes's answer, still perfectly imperturbable.

"And you, my daughter-in-law, dare to tell me that you are receiving the addresses of Mr. Percival."

"Lady Augusta," interposed Agnes, regardless of the impending storm, "you are presuming in both senses of the word. I have never said what you impute to me; and if I had, I cannot see what right you have to interfere in my affairs."

"I rather think I have some right to advise the mother of Mr. Longueville's heir," replied Lady Augusta, with an assumption of dignity which at any other time would have provoked a smile from Agnes, but she only replied, with pretended gravity,—

"Perhaps I may be stupid, but I really cannot discover what advice you have given me."

"I see clearly, Mrs. Gerald Longueville, that you are determined to treat any advice of mine with inattention, to use the mildest term. I will therefere not offer it to you, nor remain here to be treated with disrespect. I wish you good morning," and bowing to both sisters, she swept out of the room, with as much of the air of a tragedy queen as she could assume.

Agnes turned to the window, when her mother-in-law left the room, and appeared to suppress her feelings with the greatest difficulty, though as long as Lady Augusta had been present she had seemed perfectly indifferent to all her indignation. She watched the

carriage rolling away, for some minutes, with her hands clasped, as if the tension would give her strength to bear the rush of thought that was pouring through her brain, but it would not do, and, to Grace's utter dismay, she threw herself on the sofa, and burying her face in the cushions, she sobbed and almost screamed aloud with agony.

Her whole manner reminded Grace of the last time she had been in hysterics, and their cause. She went to her and said,—

"Agnes, calm yourself, mama is coming across the lawn, and you know she is not strong enough to hear any new shock; and besides, you cannot explain the cause of your annoyance,"

Agnes rose, with one of those singular efforts of which she was so capable, and, looking calmly at Grace, as she left the room, said,—

"Do not follow me, I will not make any noise to disturb mama."

When she was gone, Grace involuntarily adopted almost the same attitude which had been her sister's, though the excitement which thrilled them both was of a very different description. Grace was pondering on the events of the morning. There was but a fortnight unexpired of the three months of Mr. Percival's probation, and he had that morning, for the first time since Grace's return, met her alone, while Agnes had been pacing her room, holding bitter converse with her own heart, and discovering the intense depth of her love for the man on whose affections she had trampled, by first receiving and then discarding them for those of another, with as much apparent indifference as if she had been changing the fashion of her dress.

Although Mr. Percival had not asked Grace for an

answer to his proposal, he had contrived to intimate to her very clearly that, on that day fortnight, she would find him unaltered; nor could she doubt his truth, when she looked into those deep clear eyes. But, alas! for the instability of human happiness! The thrill of joy had scarcely reached Grace's heart, when she recalled the conversation she had recently held with Ethel Gorden, in which the latter had tried to convince her that it was very wrong to allow Agnes to continue in ignorance of her sister's half-formed engagement to Mr. Percival. It was in vain that Ethel argued. Grace could not believe that Mr. Percival did not love Agnes; and even if she had been won over by Ethel's reasons, she lacked the courage to enlighten Agnes on the subject, for her feelings on the matter were very evident to both the girls; and Ethel was sorry and indignant to see how Agnes was deceiving herself. And the misery that must accrue to both in the end. The discussion between them had been long and exciting. Ethel had offered herself to speak to Agnes, adding that every day increased the danger to her future peace of mind. Grace now deeply regretted that she had not accepted Ethel's kind offices, for she could not doubt that it would have been a wiser course for her to have done so.

CHAPTER XXII.

During all this time Monmouth had remained in Paris, and the correspondence between him and Ethel continued as close as ever, and was carried on by him under the same delusion as at first,—that he was not injuring any one but himself. By Ethel, under the conviction that he loved her, and that it mattered little whether he told her so or not. She did sometimes yearn to see him, but she could not let her wish be visible in her letters, and, indeed, so firm was his resolution not to return, that it is possible that even an expressed desire on the part of the being he loved better than himself would not have recalled him. His father, whose favourite he had always been, had in vain tried to persuade him to make Dunmere his home. From the time of his brother's death he had sedulously put from him the idea that he might be the heir of those vast estates, which would place him in the position he longed for so intensely—which would give him the power of, at least trying to win Ethel's affections. It required no small degree of self-denial to keep these thoughts from intruding; nor is it at all surprising that he did not always succeed—that, after the first intense grief for his brother had passed, the thought would sometimes glide in insidiously, and take possession of his imagination, that the time might come when he could offer his hand to Ethel, so dearly, so long loved.

One day, as he was sitting in all the luxury of an armchair, before a wood fire, which crackled and sparkled on the hearth, making a joyous accompaniment to his day-dream, he gave the reins to his fancy, and pictured Ethel on a low ottoman—her favourite seat, near one of the drawing-room windows at Dunmere Abbey—with blushing cheek, and downcast eyes, listening to the acknowledgment of his long-concealed love. The door opened, and a servant entered with a three-cornered note, directed in a lady's hand. As he woke to real life, it was with no very agreeable feelings that he recognized the writing. The note contained but a few lines, yet more than once, while reading it, he passed his hand across his eyes to clear away the mist that obscured his sight. When he had finished it, instead of resuming his pleasant reverie, he sank into a chair at the table, and, laying his arms across it, leaned his head upon them, and gave way to a flood of tears bitter as those he had shed once before, over the remains of his beloved brother. The note contained but a few lines from Mrs. Egerton, telling him of the birth of his nephew. It arrived at the most unpropitious moment, just as he had let his imagination get the better of him, and was picturing to himself a scene that he had dared to hope might be realized. When the first paroxysm of his grief and disappointment was over, he felt a kind of superstitious despair at the recollection of the dreams in which he had been indulging, when the news reached him that so completely dispelled the illusion. Having obtained leave of absence from his friend, the ambassador, he wandered about from place to place, on the continent, steady but to one purpose, that of resisting every endeavour of his father's to bring him back to Dunmere Abbey. To his self-inflicted fate we must

leave him, and return to Roseneath, which was in full beauty, and, had it been in the East, might very justly have been called Gulstad, so completely was it a garden of roses. The sylvan scenery that surrounded it gave it a soft nestling appearance, as if nothing more passionate than a nightingale ought to find entrance there. Alas! for still loveliness, it is not much to be trusted. Passion had entered there, and was carrying on its work of destruction.

The fortnight that was to bring matters to a close passed as other fortnights pass, to the world without this little paradise; but how differently to the three most interested in its termination!

A letter from Monmouth to Ethel, written in very bad spirits, had made her so wretched, that she had in a measure forgotten Agnes, and on the only two occasions of her calling at Roseneath Grace had not been at home; the latter indeed, could scarcely bear to stay in the house, and avoided every opportunity of being alone with Agnes. She felt as if there were two distinct beings within her: one supremely happy, and the other intensely wretched, as her mind dwelt, alternately, on the certainty of Mr. Perceval's love not only standing the test of Agnes's presence, but even resisting all the fascination of the most evident encouragement from her. On the other hand, all Grace's happiness was swept away in an instant, when she thought of the agony that the approaching enlightenment as to the real state of the case must inflict on Agnes. Poor Grace! she could but too well sympathize in those feelings; but nevertheless she could not summon sufficient courage to tell her sister the actual truth.

To Alfred Percival the weeks appeared long, though he saw Grace every day, and allowed himself to pay

her much more decided attention than he had ventured to do before the half-explanation that had taken place between them. At times he felt almost sure of Grace's affection for him, and then again all his hopes would be dashed to the ground, when he found that she often avoided him, and that when she did so she looked miserable. A deep sigh from him, however, more than once brought the blush to her cheek, and the look of deep interest to her soft eyes, thus restoring him the prospect of happiness, which he feared was almost too great to be realized. He was right when he told Grace that he had never known real love until he felt it for her. His whole being could rest in her, without a wish unsatisfied, whereas, during his passion for Agnes, he had never known contentment, for his very love had been torment.

All the sorrow that either he or Grace could feel was as nothing when compared with that which racked the tempest-tossed heart of Agnes, on whose mind it was dawning, more and more clearly, that she had irretrievably forfeited the devotion for which she would now give all that the world contained, were it hers, to be assured of. There were moments—so little did she appreciate the noble nature of the man she loved—when she imagined that he was only playing with Grace, to try *her*. Then her spirits would rise, and Grace would hope *she* might be mistaken, for at such times Agnes would watch all his attentions to her sister, with the most smiling indifference, wishing to pique him in return.

At last the morning broke that was to consign her to unmitigated misery. It may well be conceived that Alfred's visit on that day was a much earlier one than usual; indeed, more so than any one could have

anticipated, except Grace, who had watched so anxiously for his arrival as to begin to despair of his coming at all.

Agnes was upstairs with her baby when she saw him approaching. She would have given anything to have flown down to meet him; but she had always been accustomed to devote that hour to her child, and she did not like to allow such an every-day occurrence as a call from Mr. Percival to cause her to appear negligent of her baby. She had always put her child to sleep herself, and the employment had hitherto been one of delight to her, as she gazed on his lovely violet eyes, opening and reopening with a smile, and looking into hers as she bent over him in his cot, till they closed entirely in sleep. Passion is certainly not the true nature of woman, or at least of a true woman, for all the poets have said and sung on the subject. The passion that had taken possession of Agnes's whole being, had wrought such impatience in her, that all a young mother's feeling was swallowed up by it, and at this juncture she almost hated the child, or at least the care of him, that had before filled up so large a measure of her daily existence. Of course the more impatient she became, the more wakeful the child remained, as if he missed the soothing to which he was accustomed. Still her pride prevailed, and she did stay, though with extreme reluctance. It was with a sigh of relief that at last she rose and stole into the next room to arrange her hair before going down, while she tried to hope that Mr. Percival's protracted visit arose from his desire to see her before he left.

It may easily be imagined how Mr. Percival and Grace had been engaged during Agnes's imprisonment.

Grace would have been more than mortal if she could have remembered the many drawbacks that existed to her happiness, while she was listening to that voice so dear to her, pouring forth its tale of love into her ear. She forgot everything but that at last she might indeed trust him, and give herself up to a fulness of bliss such as she had never before imagined. The illusion was dispelled by the sound of her sister's voice, singing as she came downstairs. Without thinking of what she said, Grace exclaimed, almost with terror,—

"Oh! here is Agnes," and before Mr. Percival could utter the smiling remark that was on his lips, she had fled through the window. While he was standing in a state of irresolution whether to follow her or not, Agnes entered.

He was too happy at that moment for any disappointment to weigh upon him, and even the disappearance of Grace did not prevent him turning to receive Agnes with a beaming face, such as she had never seen him wear but once before. As he advanced to meet her, he said,—

"What do you think you have done, Agnes?"

He had never called her by that name since her marriage, and if there had been one thing above all others that annoyed her in their intercourse, it was his persistence in addressing her as Mrs. Longueville, and doing so with the most perfect unconcern. In answer to his question, her large eyes rested on him with such a look as had formerly possessed the power of half maddening him; now, however, it was with a feeling almost amounting to dislike that he thought, "The coquette, does she fancy it possible for her to fool me again?" but he merely said,—

"Well, have you no curiosity to know the mischief you have done?"

He was still smiling as she had so rarely seen him smile.

"Yes," she answered, throwing down her eyes, and with the tell-tale blood mantling in her cheek, "I am very willing to hear anything you have to tell me."

"Well, then, your voice has frightened Grace from me; she has actually run away, though ten minutes ago she had promised to be mine for life."

Every tinge of colour left Agnes's face, and she stood as if turned to stone. Slowly, heavily, her eyelids raised as if to read her doom in his countenance. What she read there appeared to stir every feeling of passion within her. The blood, as if boiling up from her heart, flooded her neck and brow, and stamping her foot on the ground, she exclaimed, in thrilling tones of agony and indignation,—

"How dare you tell me so!"

He started, and for a moment turned pale, but almost immediately recovering his usual quiet self-possession, he took her unresisting hand, and placed her in a chair; then standing by her side where she could not see his face, he said,—

"Agnes, when you have reflected calmly on the subject, I am sure you will think differently. You forget," he continued, with a slight curl of his lip, which however was not visible to her, "that you rejected me, or rather broke your plighted faith with me, and now, if I had a heart and home to offer you, they would not be such as your tastes could appreciate."

Again she gave way to the passion that was burning within her, and starting from her seat, she confronted him, crying out,—

"Oh! that I could hate you! Oh! that I could curse you! or do anything that would change you from that cold insulting manner! But I can do nothing but love you," and sinking into her chair again, she gave way to a most violent flood of tears.

It was fortunate for Mr. Percival that he really loved Grace, for few men could have withstood such a declaration from such lips, even though their calmer judgment might condemn it.

He scarcely knew what to do, for he was well aware that anything he could say would only excite her more; yet he did not like to leave her; and as he stood waiting for the paroxysm of her passion to subside, he thought, with deep regret, that Grace must have known the state of Agnes's mind, and that it would be a cause of grief to her, and materially affect her happiness. With a lover's fondness he was contrasting Grace's soft, gentle, though deep love for him, so long concealed, with Agnes's whirlwind of passion, when she suddenly raised her head, and with flashing eyes, cried,—

"What are you standing looking at me for? You want your revenge for my broken faith, and you have it!"

Slowly she rose while speaking, as if to leave the room, but at the first step she faltered, and would have fallen if Mr. Percival had not caught her. He replaced her on the chair; then sitting down beside her, and taking her hand again, he said,—

"Agnes, if you could see my heart at this moment, you would know how hardly you have judged me. I feel a brother's affection for you, and deeply, earnestly do I hope that you will feel a sister's affection for me."

The calm quietness of his tone breathed on Agnes's passionate nature like the cool sea breeze on a fevered brow. The flush faded from her cheek, and bowing her head as if in submission to a will too strong for her to resist, she remained silent.

Anxiously he watched her, not without a fear that Grace might return, for he dreaded exposing her soft loving nature to the sorrow which such a scene would inevitably inflict upon her; and he was also desirous to spare Agnes the humility of such a disclosure, for well he knew what the bitterness of that humiliation would be to her haughty spirit, when the fierce excitement which now blinded her had passed away. The perfect stillness of the summer day descended upon her, and a sensation of dreary quietude stole into her heart, and with it for the first time came a sense of what she had done. She raised her head, but without looking up, and said,—

"Mr. Percival, I wish to be alone."

He understood the change immediately, and silently taking her hand for a moment, he left the room. With the delicacy of feeling so natural to him, he did not follow Grace through the window; but nevertheless he contrived to find her in the garden, and to prevent her returning to the house until Agnes had had time to seek the retirement of her own room, or to recover her self-command. After he was gone, she sat long without stirring, as if in a stupor. At last she rose slowly, and languidly went to her chamber, where she sank rather than threw herself upon the bed, her only desire at the instant being to avoid the light. She fancied if she could but give one scream, she should be better able to bear the weight that was crushing her to the earth. In all the trials

of her life, she had hitherto had to bear, in addition, the miserable consciousness that they had been brought on by her own folly. She was not, however, as yet, in a state to reason; she could only feel that she was wretched, and that, so far from having any one to sympathise with her, or help her to endure this fresh sorrow, she should be obliged to conceal it from all the world. That she had betrayed herself to Mr. Percival, was the bitterest drop in the cup she had prepared for herself to drink.

The merry laugh of her baby, in another room, where his nurse was playing with him, fell unheeded on her ear. Before Grace re-entered the house, she had had her room darkened by the nurse, who was quite alarmed at finding her in such a state as to preclude her being able to bear the presence of her child, whose company had hitherto seemed to be a panacea for all the ills that life is subject to. It was, therefore, no matter of surprise to Grace that a headache so severe as to banish the little Gerald should prevent her sister from congratulating her upon her happiness, or from appearing at dinner, where Mr. Percival had joined the happy mother and daughter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE morning after these events had occurred, Mr. Longueville, Lady Augusta, and Ethel, were at breakfast in the pleasantest of morning-rooms. But though surrounded by all that apparently could give happiness, there was little enjoyment there. It required more than even Ethel's hopeful, elastic temperament to sustain those spirits that now formed the greater part of Mr. Longueville's comfort in life. He had grieved deeply for Gerald, and now he grieved almost as deeply over the estrangement from home of his other son. He had tried in vain to elicit from Monmouth his reasons for a course of action which appeared to him so enigmatical. Mr. Longueville, as well as the others, had regretted the birth of his grandson; but he had never been heard to express his feelings on the subject, and he had always been most kind to Agnes, and even took more notice of her infant than he had taken of his own children in their boyhood. Nevertheless, he felt the little stranger an interloper, and from the time of its birth he had given Lady Augusta to understand, in the most determined manner, that they were for the future to live sufficiently within their income to accumulate a fortune for Monmouth.

The necessity for doing so never seemed to have struck him until he looked upon his grandson as his heir.

Lady Augusta at first yielded without a murmur, believing that the fancy, as she called it, would not last. But when she found it not only lasted, but that it was to be carried so far as to preclude her going to town for the season, her dislike to Agnes, the innocent cause of her being subjected to these restrictions, became intense.

Often would Ethel fly from her invectives against the young widow to the shelter of Roseneath, where Lady Augusta, had she dared to interfere, would have prevented her going; but it was too late now for her to obtain any power over Ethel, as she had commenced by wishing her to take her own way in everything, in the hope that such a mode of proceeding, might further the accomplishment of her darling scheme, that of marrying her to Gerald, and that having failed, she still cherished the hope that the fortune of Mr. Longueville's ward might fall to the lot of Monmouth.

This morning the party were not inclined to be lively. Ethel was thinking of Grace and Agnes. She had said and done everything she could to bring about an explanation between the sisters, to avoid, what she well knew from Agnes's disposition must be the consequences of Mr. Percival's declaration to Grace.

"Ethel, my child, why are you becoming so grave? Are you regretting the London season?" asked Mr. Longueville.

"No, indeed," replied Ethel, with one of her brightest smiles; "I never was more pleased than when I heard you were not going to leave the dear Abbey this year."

He looked at her for a moment, and then said,—

"You are a good girl, Ethel; but, my love, perhaps that is too great a sacrifice to expect from a young girl; and if you like I can consign you to the care of my sister for the time; she goes out a great deal?"

Ethel laughed outright at this suggestion, and exclaimed,—

"Pray do not speak of such a thing; the sacrifice to me would be to go through a season in town, and forsake all my beautiful flowers, and all my friends too. I really think it is not at all good-natured of you to wish to get rid of me in such a summary style."

He laughed and said,—

"You are a darling."

But Lady Augusta took up the matter quite gravely, and interposed with,—

"I am sure Mr. Longueville could not wish you to leave us; and as I cannot chaperon you this year, I consider that you are quite right to give up the idea of being presented until we take a house in town, when I hope we shall have Monmouth to attend us."

The sudden mention of Monmouth's name called up a vivid blush to Ethel's cheek, and seeing Mr. Longueville looking at her very earnestly, her eyelids drooped by degrees, as if weighed down by the intensity of his gaze; and intense it certainly was, for the idea had just struck him for the first time that Monmouth's continued absence was in some way connected with Ethel. Mr. Longueville had himself married more for beauty than for love; and it had never occurred to him that there could be any danger in his sons living on such intimate terms with Ethel. He thought her a sweet pretty girl, and now that the idea reached his brain he did not know what to make of it. He sat

looking at her while Lady Augusta went on in a complaining strain,—

"He is the most teasing person I ever knew, and, indeed, it is very wrong of him not to come home, when he must know, or at least guess, that Mr. Longueville is staying in the country solely for his benefit."

Ethel raised her eyes with a flash of indignation at Lady Augusta, and was just going to defend Monmouth against what she deemed an unjust accusation, when, meeting Mr. Longueville's half-laughing, half-puzzled gaze, she stopped with her lips apart, and glanced at him in absolute terror, for a moment feeling as if he had looked into her heart and discovered the secret of her life.

But Ethel was not a girl to be easily subdued; she soon recovered, and in a different tone from that which she would have used had she spoken at first, she said,—

"I think Monmouth is quite right not to return until he has seen the continent as it ought to be seen. Half the world run over it, without acquiring an idea that they could not find much better defined in Murray's hand-books than in their own minds."

"What do you say, Ethel, to our joining him, and seeing all that is to be seen together? Do you not fancy he would like it better than rambling about, as he is doing, in solitude?" asked Mr. Longueville.

Ethel was not in the habit of saying, or even of implying, what was not true in the strictest sense of the word, so she answered,—

"It would be very pleasant, perhaps; but I suppose, if he did not prefer his solitary rambles, he could easily find an agreeable travelling companion." As she said

this, she gradually became paler, instead of blushing, as Mr. Longueville expected her to do; for she thought if they were to propose joining him he would find some excuse for cutting short his travels.

The puzzled expression came back to Mr. Longueville's face, and he sat silent, lost in his examination of Ethel's countenance, scarcely hearing, and certainly not heeding, Lady Augusta, who was arranging a plan to start immediately for the continent. Just as she had come to the conclusion that it would be the most delightful thing in the world, a servant entering, presented a note to Ethel. It was from Grace; but no answer required. Ethel broke the seal with a sense of relief at the welcome interruption to her embarrassment, and to the consciousness of Mr. Longueville's investigating gaze, so very different from his usual open, pleased expression. The contents of the note, however, soon diverted her thoughts from herself, and she exclaimed,—

"Oh, I am so glad!—so very glad!" and she looked up at Mr. Longueville.

He smiled his old good-humoured smile, and said,—

"I hope you do not mean to keep all your gladness to yourself."

"Oh! no," she replied; "but I am so glad, because it is the very thing I have been wishing for so long. Grace Egerton is going to be married to Mr. Percival. But of course it is still a great secret, and I dare say Grace will not be much obliged to me for telling you so soon."

"I, too, am very glad," he replied; "Grace Egerton is an excellent girl, and will make Percival happy."

Lady Augusta was perfectly aghast when she remembered her last visit to Roseneath, and the sarcasm,

or, as she termed it, the impertinence of Agnes, and the manner in which she had laid herself open to it. Although she had much more reason to rejoice at the present state of affairs than Mr. Longueville, she could not do so at first, she felt so mortified at having acted on the gossiping intelligence that she had been —from her dislike to Agnes—but too ready to take for truth. She remained quite silent, until Ethel said, most innocently,—

"Are you not glad, Lady Augusta?"

She started, and replied,—

"Yes; but I was led to believe that he looked higher, I mean to her sister."

"I wish, my dear," broke in Mr. Longueville, "that you would not give credit to all the gossip you hear from the village; I have often felt inclined to sweep it off the estate altogether."

Lady Augusta coloured at the reproof, but she was too angry with herself for having been so easily deceived to attempt any defence. She relapsed into silence, and the course of Mr. Longueville's reflections was soon changed, for he said,—

"I am particularly pleased that this marriage is about to take place, for Monmouth is such a friend of Percival's that it may be an inducement to him to come home."

This was addressed in a questioning tone to Ethel, but as it elicited from her only a bright blush, he added,—

"What does my little sage say on the subject?"

"I really do not know. Monmouth does not think like other people, so," added she, looking at him with her own beaming smile, "you must ask himself."

Mr. Longueville did not reply in words, but with a

smile, as he thought of a question to be put to her, before he would consult Monmouth on the occasion; but not being able to enter on the matter then, he was obliged to let her go to Roseneath, whither she drove immediately after breakfast.

On her arrival she found things much as she had expected and feared. Grace was in her room, not in the best possible spirits, and yet dreading lest her mother should discover it, and misinterpret it. On Ethel's entrance she ran to meet her, exclaiming,—

"Dearest Ethel! I knew you would come. I am so very glad to see you!"

"Where is Agnes?" asked Ethel, looking round the room.

"Agnes is not well, she has one of her bad headaches. It is so very bad that she cannot see even her little baby."

"Which you consider very strange, I dare say, my dear Grace, but which I do not. How long has she been ill?"

"Only since yesterday. I was very anxious that mama should not tell her of my engagement while she was so poorly; but our dear mother thought it would do her good, and she says she cried for joy when she heard it; so you see, Ethel, you were quite mistaken."

"Was I, dear? Well, so much the better. To be mistaken is sometimes very pleasant," she added, with a slight though thoughtful smile. "But here I have been talking to you these last five minutes, and I have not yet told you how delighted I was to get your tiny note this morning. Do you know, we were all in our own way made happy by the news of your happiness, even Lady Augusta."

"Indeed! I never should have fancied that Lady Augusta would care about the matter, one way or the other," replied Grace.

"Her caring for it is very easily accounted for. She was dreadfully afraid that Mr. Percival was determined to become papa to the heir of Dunmere. You know," she added, as Grace coloured, "Lady Augusta is always thinking of herself and her belongings, and she imagines all the world are similarly employed. But I do not wish to talk of her just now; I wish to know all about your own dear self."

"Oh!" said Grace, her cheek flushing, "I am very happy, now that I am relieved from all uneasiness about Agnes. You cannot imagine the wretchedness of the last year. From the time I went to Paris I have never known what real happiness was until yesterday. Indeed, I doubt if I ever knew what it was to be really happy from my childhood; and now it appears almost too great a weight to bear."

The tears started to her eyes as she spoke.

"Oh, my dear, if you are overburdened I will relieve you of a share of it. I never, I assure you, was in more want of a little to keep me from being envious of you just at present."

Grace smiled through her tears. She thought Ethel was only jesting; but if she had been as observing as Ethel herself, she would have perceived more of earnestness than perhaps her friend would have cared to display.

"I hope, Grace, to make amends for your inability to share this agreeable burden with me, you will give me a *carte blanche* to invite your guests."

"I almost think I might trust you, Ethel, for I am ture you do not approve of a number of uninterested

people being present on such occasions. The ceremony is too solemn to be considered in the light of an amusement or a show."

"Yes, but I have an idea that it may very properly be made a season of reunion in families. Who does Mr. Percival intend to have for his friend *par excellence* at his wedding?"

Ethel had just reached the point she was afraid she should never have courage to approach. Grace's answer was not very consolatory, for she simply said,—

"I have no idea. Is it for that you want the *carte blanche?*"

Ethel blushed scarlet as she replied,—

"If I had it, it would not do me much good, as I could not make use of it."

Grace began to think Ethel was not quite like herself to-day, and as she was always rather matter-of-fact, where she believed there was anything she ought to say or do, she looked earnestly at Ethel with the words,—

"Ethel, I am sure there is some one you wish to be invited; if you will tell me who it is, I am certain Mr. Percival will ask him; he will not refuse me if I express a strong desire on the subject."

"I have no doubt of your influence," rejoined Ethel, quite gravely; "but I do not think I will trust him this time."

Grace looked so mortified that Ethel could not help laughing, which only made her colour more, and she said,—

"You do not know Mr. Percival, Ethel, or you would not say that."

"I do know him, Grace, and I firmly believe that he would do anything for you that he did not think

was wrong; and, moreover, I am certain that the longer you live together the more willing he will be to indulge you. Now what more can I say?"

"Just to trust me, which I feel you have not done, although I cannot tell in what way. I know you have something on your mind that will not come out."

"You are right, dear Grace," said Ethel, becoming serious, "and I will tell you who it is that I wish Mr. Percival to ask. It is Monmouth. You are aware that it is Mr. Longueville's most earnest wish that he should come home, and I have an idea that it is my being at Dunmere which keeps him away. How this is you must not ask me; but I have fancied that his great friendship for Mr. Percival might, on such an occasion as this, induce him to return. But you may guess that I should be very sorry to have my name brought into question on the subject."

"I know, Ethel, what I should feel myself in such a case, and yet how sorry I should be to have any gossip or even remarks made about it; so you may trust me to have him here without mentioning your name; and then you will have all the happiness of bringing him back to his father."

Ethel was too truthful to like having such a motive imputed to her, it was so much better than her real one, though, if she had had no other, it would have been sufficient to have made her act as she had done. Her lips parted as if to speak, and then closed again, for she knew not what to say. Grace saw, or fancied she saw, that her arrangement rather caused annoyance than pleasure to her friend; but she had gone as far as she thought she ought to go, and she did not like to intrude on Ethel's confidence, as she could not

but observe how embarrassing it would be to her to pursue the topic.

They were silent for a few minutes, and then Ethel burst forth suddenly,—

"Grace, I cannot bear you to think better of me than I deserve. I do not wish Monmouth to come home for Mr. Longueville's sake. And now having eased my conscience," she continued, with a laugh, "I do not mean to say another word."

"You are a strange Ethel," said Grace, smiling; "but of course you must have your own way, as you always have."

They went down-stairs to the drawing-room, where they found Mrs. Egerton, whom Ethel asked if she might see Agnes. Mrs. Egerton said her daughter was really suffering very much from her head, but that she was sure she would admit Ethel. She went up-stairs to tell Agnes, and immediately returned, much to Ethel's astonishment, with the message that the invalid would be very glad to see her.

Agnes's indomitable pride had come to her assistance. After a long sleepless night she felt the necessity that existed for her to act her part in such a manner that none should suspect the real state of her feelings. It was almost maddening to reflect that she had exposed herself to the very person of all the world in whose opinion she most desired to stand high. It was not yet possible for her to feel comfort in the assurance that he was too high-minded to betray her even to his wife. She was glad that Ethel had asked to see her while she was ill in bed, as she dreaded her clear honest eyes, that always appeared to Agnes to look straight through all her turnings and windings. Ethel was quite as well pleased to meet her first in such a

manner, and to have all the awkward congratulations over without the clear daylight shining on both their faces. She glided softly into the darkened room, and drawing aside the curtains, she took Agnes's fevered hand and held it gently in her's as the said,—

"Dear Agnes, I am so sorry you are ill. You must send me away if my voice annoys you; but I did not like to leave without telling you that I came to congratulate Grace on her future prospects. I am so thankful she is not going away. She will be just as near to us as ever, and I can help her to do the business of the parish; and we shall both settle down into good Lady Bountifuls. I shall be glad when it is all over, for your sake,"—she felt the little hand that lay in hers twitch convulsively, but she went on in a steady voice,—"it will so forcibly remind you of your own marriage." Take care, Ethel, are you not overstepping your own rules? I am afraid Ethel had forgotten herself, in her anxiety to spare feelings that she knew to be so acute, for she went on without a battle with her conscience, "I wish you would come to Dunmere as soon as you are well again. I am so lonely, and baby would, at least, be welcome to his grandpapa; he takes much more notice of him, Lady Augusta says, than he ever did of his own sons when they were infants."

Ethel talked away in this manner, without giving Agnes any time to answer her, with the intention of leading her away from the subject upon which it might well be supposed she could not command herself to speak. Ethel succeeded, as she always did, in her kind efforts to spare the feelings of others. Agnes removed her hand from her eyes, where she had kept it while Ethel had been talking, and said—

"I should like very much to go to Dunmere for a little while, if it were not for Lady Augusta, she is so excessively disagreeable."

"Have you ever tried to win her, Agnes?"

"The task would be quite too Herculean for my powers. I really believe she hates me without limitation, and I must say I return the feeling with interest, if that were possible."

"Oh! Agnes, dear, that is not right. You know you do all you can to show your contempt for her, and it is not natural that such a person as she is could bear quietly with such continual opposition from you. However, she is going next week to Sir Mark Eveleen's, and I don't mean to accompany her; so if you will come to me then, you will be my chaperon, for my dear old guardian is out all day, and I may be meeting with all sorts of adventures in his absence, to the great scandal of all the good gossips of the flourishing village of Roseneath, if you leave me in solitary grandeur. Do come, dear Agnes, I will drive over for you in the pony phaeton."

The offered relief was too great to be refused, and Agnes consented to go, as soon as Lady Augusta should leave for Sir Mark's. Ethel had gained her point, and as she knew it would be better for Agnes to be left alone, she bade farewell, and returned on her way with the happy feeling that she had in some degree soothed Agnes, though at the expense of a good deal of self-denial on her own part, for Agnes was now almost the last companion she would have chosen in her solitude. Grace did not forget her task, though, in her extreme anxiety not to let Ethel's name appear in it, performed it so awkwardly, that Mr. Percival said, laughingly, it was well for him he was not of a

jealous disposition, or he might suspect she had some secret reason for her anxiety on the subject.

Poor Grace began seriously to defend herself from the aspersion, to his immense delight, for her extreme innocence was to him one of her greatest charms.

She had, however, the gratification to find that he threw himself into the scheme for bringing back Monmouth with all the zeal she could desire, and that he did not press her for reasons. Perhaps he guessed them pretty nearly, as he had so often seen Monmouth and Ethel together. The letter was written and, not a little to Monmouth's relief and satisfaction, he was thereby entitled to fancy himself obliged to return home, to attend his friend's wedding.

CHAPTER XXIV.

When Agnes rose from her bed, she expressed so strong a desire to accept Ethel's invitation, that, notwithstanding her apparent unfitness to leave home, her mother did not like to oppose her inclination, fancying that she wished to be at Dunmere, and that she had only hitherto refused because of the coldness of Lady Augusta's invitations. So she went; but Ethel scarcely knew what to do with her, she looked so wretched, and was so absent in manner when they were alone together. It was only in Mr. Longueville's company that Agnes exerted herself, and then so effectually, that Ethel almost lost patience with her, for her selfish indulgence at other times, particularly as Ethel was as well aware of the subject which engrossed her guest's reflections as if the latter had taken her into her confidence; though she could not know all their bitterness, for Ethel's mind was too pure to imagine any of her sex giving way to the manifestation of passion as Agnes had done.

Lady Augusta was detained a fortnight, which was much longer than she had calculated upon; but at the end of that time she was expected home, and no entreaties of Mr. Longueville's could prevail on Agnes to continue her visit after the return of her mother-in-law. Great was Ethel's relief at her departure. Before it took place she had received a letter from

Monmouth which rather puzzled her. It was much colder in its tone than his previous letters had been, even from the first, and there was an air of restraint pervading it that vexed and mortified her extremely. From its tenor she anticipated that they should meet as they had parted, in punctilious coldness,—so different from the meeting she had so often pictured to herself, as every communication that reached her breathed more and more of brotherly affection.

Agnes returned to Roseneath like a shadow of her former self. She devoted her whole time to the care of her baby, ostensibly in order to leave Grace and Mr. Percival to enjoy their rambles without deeming it necessary to ask her to accompany them; but in reality to escape the torture of witnessing the happiness she so coveted for herself bestowed on another. The same kind of stupor was creeping over her that had so crushed all her powers of action in Paris after Gerald's death. Now, as then, a good deal of remorse mixed itself with her grief; for she thought, and thought justly, that much of her present misery might have been spared, had she not exposed herself to Mr. Percival in the first wild gush of her passion. The humiliating reflection rankled in her bosom, until she would have done almost anything to have shifted it.

Meanwhile Ethel had her own trial, for she loved Monmouth as deeply as Agnes had ever loved Mr. Percival; but it was with the pure affection of a true woman's heart, and if it brought sorrow, there was no feeling of disgrace attached to it.

It had been Mr. Longueville's intention, before writing to request his son to come home for Mr Percival's wedding, to ask Ethel if there were any

reasons connected with her which would prevent his doing so—in fact, to discover if she had refused him; but there was something so dignified in Ethel's character and manner, notwithstanding her childish innocence, that he found the task too difficult, and was quite relieved when he heard that Mr. Percival had himself written. Mr. Longueville watched in vain for some clue to Ethel's thoughts in her changing countenance, at the first announcement of Monmouth's return.

She had become afraid of his scrutiny since the morning she had so nearly betrayed herself at the breakfast-table, and had therefore determined to be very guarded in Mr. Longueville's presence, which was easier to do, as Monmouth's expected reappearance was made so constantly the subject of conversation. It was not so easy to hope that she should be able to meet him calmly, and the more she dwelt upon the approaching scene, the more nervous she became. She spent a great part of her time with Grace, or Agnes, nursing or playing with the baby, and occasionally, when she could not but see how little happiness the young mother seemed to derive from the child, she felt tempted to wish it had never been born; but whenever this evil suggestion crossed her mind she repelled it with horror.

One day Agnes, wearied out with her self-imposed task, had thrown herself on the bed; and Ethel said she would take the baby down to pay a visit to his aunt Grace.

She did so; but Grace was nowhere to be found, so she sat down on a low seat near the window to play with the child, of whom she was really fond, and who repaid her fondness by the most endearing affection.

They were mutually pleased with each other, and the joyous cries of the little one, and the clear soft laugh of the young girl, made very pretty music, which, however, did not last long, for Ethel heard a step on the gravel, and turning to call Grace—whom she supposed it to be—to partake of her amusement, met the bright speaking eyes of Monmouth. Fortunately the baby was on the ground at her feet, for she started up; and though she held out her hand to him mechanically, every shade of colour had fled from her face, and even her lips had become as pale as her cheek. She felt scarcely able to stand. But Ethel's self-respect was not long in coming to her assistance. Before he could speak—for her unexpected agitation had completely taken from him the power to do so—she had regained self-command enough to say,—

"Oh! Monmouth, I am delighted to see you; but you startled me so by your sudden appearance, that I am only surprised you have not the felicity of carrying me home in a fainting fit."

"I promise myself much more felicity," he replied, "in taking you home leaning on my arm. But indeed I am very sorry I have startled you, for either you are not so well as I hoped to have found you, or you have not yet recovered your alarm."

There was no reason to find fault with her want of colour, as she answered him,—

"Indeed I am quite well. But, Monmouth, you have not been introduced to your nephew." And she turned, to let him see the child, who gazed up at him with a cherub face such as Raphael might have chosen for one of his angels.

Monmouth was made but of poor humanity, and as he looked at his lost brother's boy, it was with sorrow-

ing eyes, for just at that moment he felt more acutely than ever the value of that treasure of which the child had been the innocent means of robbing him.

"Well, Monmouth, do you not think him a perfect angel?"

"He may be an angel; but I cannot pretend to like the child."

Her very brow reddened as she stooped to take up the little fellow, who laid his curly head on her shoulder, still keeping those angelic eyes fixed on Monmouth. Ethel was sorely disappointed; she expected something more in Monmouth than is generally found in every-day mortals, and it was in a tone very cold indeed that she said,—

"It was not the poor child's fault, Monmouth, that he came between you and this world's goods."

It was now Monmouth's turn to become pale. He could bear anything but the loss of her good opinion.

"Ethel, you know, or at least you ought to know, full well that my dislike to the boy does not proceed from his having come between me and the inheritance that otherwise would have been mine."

Her lovely eyes rested on his with an expression he could not comprehend, as she said,—

"If not, then your dislike to Gerald's only child is indeed unnatural."

When she had ceased speaking, she raised the little head of the half-frightened infant to caress it, as if she wished to make amends for his uncle's want of affection. He understood the action as well as if she had spoken the reproof, and flushing to his forehead, exclaimed,—

"It is perfectly intolerable, Ethel, I cannot bear it."

"You cannot bear what?" asked she, with increasing coldness.

It struck her that he could not bear to see her caressing the child, and there succeeded a chilling fear that her good, her noble-minded Monmouth was altered. As the idea took possession of her mind, she became not only pale but haggard. He saw the change that had come over her, and gazed at her, till, as he had said, he could bear it no longer, and he exclaimed, vehemently,—

"Ethel, you do me injustice. The reason I cannot love the child is that I love you so wildly as to become a self-banished man, lest I should not have the strength to resist telling you so, if I remained near you. I dared to hope at one time that I might come back and offer you a home such as your husband ought to have before he sought your alliance. Could I love this boy, whose birth took from me the hope of such happiness?"

She still continued silent, and he proceeded,—

"You think perhaps I ought to be more noble-minded, and were you in my place you would be so; but, Ethel, you do not know the strength, the vehemence of a man's love. I fancied I had gained such power over myself that I might live near you, and, to all appearance, love you only as a brother, and now, Ethel, you will despise me."

She raised her eyes to his without the slightest embarrassment, and with that clear, truthful expression, which was one of her greatest charms, she answered him,—

"No, indeed, Monmouth, I do not despise you; but——"

She stopped, and her eyes fell before his gaze, and

her face grew crimson. He waited for her to continue, but he waited in vain, so at last he said,—

"But what, dearest Ethel? You have still a doubt of some kind."

Still she remained silent; but she looked so confused that he could not tell to what the "but" related. A thousand wild thoughts rushed through his brain, amongst others the idea that she loved some one better than himself. He must know the truth, and he exclaimed,—

"Is it that you cannot return my affection?"

At the question all her self-command came back, and even a certain degree of coldness pervaded her manner as she answered,—

"Monmouth, you have no right to ask me such a question. My doubt—if you must know—is that, notwithstanding the profession you have just made, you do not really love me."

"Ask for any proof you like, Ethel, and you shall see that I love you, as never man loved woman. I cannot remember the time when you were not my idol."

She looked for a moment undecided, and then said,—

"No, Monmouth, the only proof you could give me is one I can never ask you for."

This was said in a tone of such gentle sadness as quite to break down all Monmouth's resolutions, and he said,—

"Ethel, I am a poor man, and in asking you to be mine the world would say I was doing well for myself; but there is not a woman in the world but yourself for whom I could humble myself as I do now in entreating of you to accept my hand. I despise myself for it; but if it could add one gleam to your happiness, it is enough."

She saw the struggle in his face; she heard the want of words to express what he felt, and turning to him, she frankly held out her hand, saying,—

"You have given me the proof I could not ask for," and lowering her voice and her eyes, she added, "I accept it."

In spite of all his sturdy independence, the certainty that his affection was returned, and that circumstances had obliged him to declare himself, brought a thrill of happiness to his heart, such as he had never before experienced. He could scarcely believe that all his misery was of his own creating, and that a few words had sufficed to sweep away the resolution of years. Still, in the midst of all his joy, the remembrance of his own weakness would recur to him; and when Ethel, noticing the change of his voice, ventured to glance up at him, she discerned but too plainly the thoughts that were passing through his mind; and she was forced to acknowledge to herself that what she had so often conceived as the perfection of happiness had brought with it a thorn, which would rankle more than even she was willing to confess; but she consoled herself with the belief that all should be right when she could speak more freely on the subject, and reason him out of his unreasonable fancies. For such, in his case, she considered them to be. Meanwhile, the portion of bliss they were both enjoying invested them with quite a radiant aspect, as they walked together through the park. The cloud itself was so lighted up as to be very unlike a cloud at all. Before they left Roseneath he had become quite reconciled to his nephew, who, he said, laughingly, had given his uncle back the treasure of which by his birth he had robbed him. The little fellow seemed quite ready to claim

relationship, and resisted sturdily when his nurse came to take him away. When he was gone, Monmouth turned to Ethel, and said,—

"I do not wonder you were angry with me just now My not liking that little fellow does appear to me very inhuman.

It was late when they reached the Abbey, and Ethel ran upstairs with a light step, and a heart as light, to her own room, though when there, and separated for the moment from Monmouth, she could scarcely realize the certainty that he was not again going to leave her.

Monmouth went into the library to seek his father, but he was not sorry to find that he had not yet returned from his ride. Although to Mr. Longueville he had never made any profession of his love of independence, yet he felt assured that his father's opinion on that head agreed with his own. After dinner, when Lady Augusta and Ethel had left the dining-room, he sat in silence, considering how he could best break the tidings of his engagement to his father. At last Mr. Longueville spoke,—

"Monmouth, I think your travels have not improved you; you don't seem happy. Do you want a helping hand in any difficulties?"

Monmouth smiled as he answered,—

"I want to be reconciled to myself, for having done a very foolish thing, or, at least, for having done what I have always resolved not to do."

"Not taken a French wife, I hope, my dear fellow?"

"Not quite so bad as that, though something like it."

Mr. Longueville had spoken jestingly, and he looked very grave at Monmouth's reply. He had taken it

strongly into his head that Ethel was attached to Monmouth, and he so dearly loved her, that he earnestly wished that the feeling might be mutual. But seeing them as usual at dinner, he could not suppose that Monmouth's words had any reference to his ward.

The change in his face was so obvious that Monmouth could not help remarking it, and he said,—

"Would you so much dislike the idea of my marrying?"

"A few minutes ago I thought I should have liked it very much; but——"

"You have altered your mind very quickly; may I ask what I have said to produce such an alteration?"

"Mr. Longueville hesitated a little, and then replied,—

"The truth is, Monmouth, I had built a castle in the air for you, and now I am sorry to see it fall to pieces with a breath."

"Perhaps we can build it up again," said Monmouth, with rather an amused smile. "What was it like?"

"It has melted into thin air, and as you did not build for yourself, you are not worthy of possessing it."

"You are rather hard upon me, as I do not know how to begin."

"Jesting apart, Monmouth, lately I have wished most strongly that you would attach yourself to Ethel; not for her fortune, but for herself. I fancied—but in that I may have erred—that you might win her. She is the only girl I ever met that I would care to call my daughter."

"But do you not consider it despicable in a man to be indebted to his wife for all that he has?"

Monmouth pressed his lips together as if the idea

was very painful to himself. A minute's speechless reflection on his father's part was almost past bearing, as he listened for Mr. Longueville's unprejudiced opinion on what he had done. It was what he most longed for, with the hope that it might by possibility reconcile him to himself, and yet he dreaded it much more. At length Mr. Longueville said,—

"As a general rule I think a man who owes all to his wife is in a wrong position, and therefore a degrading one; but you do not know Ethel, or rather, you do not love her, or you would not allow any consideration to weigh against the struggle to gain her."

"My dear father, you are right; she is indeed a woman worth a man's humbling himself for, and I have done it."

"And has she refused you?" asked Mr. Longueville, flushing crimson, and half-rising from his chair,

"No, she has not, though I confess I deserved it, I was so unwilling to propose to her."

"And, you ungrateful dog, is this the way in which you take such a piece of good fortune?"

"I have been wishing so much to have your candid judgment on the matter, that I did not like to tell you until I had previously discovered in what light you would view it. I have often wondered you did not guess why I absented myself from home."

"It never could have entered into my philosophy that a young fellow would run away from a girl he was in love with. That was not the way I carried on the war with your mother."

"You could carry on the war having something to carry it on with; but I could not, being, in fact, a beggar." He said this with some bitterness.

"Not quite a beggar, Monmouth. You know there is

three thousand a year that is not entailed, which it was always my intention to bequeath to you; it cannot make much difference in a clear property of twenty thousand a year, and it will be quite the same to me to give it up to you now. I had intended retrenching for the purpose of leaving you more independent, by which means you would have been enabled to marry, if your choice had fallen on a fortuneless bride; but now I think the three thousand a year, with Ethel's large estates, will save me any further trouble about the matter."

"You have indeed removed a weight from my mind, and I feel most grateful to you for your generosity, my dear father."

"Do not talk of generosity, my dear boy; it is your right, and as such, enjoy it, and take with it my hearty congratulations on the wife you are about to own. I believe there is not such another in the world; and now I may tell you that I believe she loves you well, which is more than you deserve for leaving her so long pining after you."

"I cannot flatter myself that she has pined much in my absence. I never saw her looking so lovely as she did to-day."

"No doubt, no doubt. But I suppose that is a gentle hint that you would like to enjoy the lovely view just at present; so go and take her for a walk, and I will tell your mother the good news."

It was good news to all but Agnes, who was too essentially selfish to feel much for any one but herself; and she had certainly sufficient on her mind to engross a less selfish person. She could not separate herself from the family, and though Mr. Percival never deviated in the slightest degree

from his usual respectful manner, yet she could not but feel that he must hold her in the most sovereign contempt. So great was the torture she endured from her self-accusations, as well as from the strength of her unresisted love for the man whom she must so soon see the husband of her sister, that she resolved not to remain at Roseneath after their marriage. No one guessed the reason of her altered appearance but Ethel, in whose kind nature there was such a store of pity and unselfishness that, notwithstanding her engagement, and all its happy consequences, she contrived to shield Agnes very often from the trials to which she must otherwise have been subjected. One thing she had determined upon, namely, that Agnes should not be present at the wedding. She dreaded the effect it might have upon her, and the consequent gossip it must entail. She overpersuaded Mrs. Egerton to yield to her opinion, although the mother could not understand, until Ethel enlightened her in some way of her own, that there could be any impropriety in a widow attending her sister's wedding. She conceded the point, however, to Ethel, who always carried the day, simply because every one knew that she was never thinking of her own enjoyment in any arrangement she was anxious to effect. And in the present instance she was most anxious, for she knew it was but common charity to preserve poor Agnes from an ordeal which she dreaded for her as much as she would have dreaded it for herself.

The morning, so fatal to Agnes, but which promised so much happiness to Grace, at length arrived. It was one of the loveliest days of soft September, as gentle as the sweet serious bride herself. There were but few present at the marriage, according to Graces'

earnest desire. Unlike most bridegrooms, Mr. Percival was not the least agitated, and though grave, he never looked happier or handsomer than during the ceremony, which gave him all that he most wished for on earth. Even Agnes—who had been a great source of uneasiness to him—was forgotten; and from the moment that Grace was his own, beyond the power of man to take from him, he appeared not to have a thought for any one but herself. An uninterested spectator would have fancied Grace quite indifferent, for she was, if anything, quieter than usual, and even unchanged in looks, with the exception of a slight increase of peach colour in her cheek, and a richer light in her soft eyes. Mr. Percival was fortunate in his choice, for he had married a pure child of nature, whose affection for him was as gentle as it was deep.

Through Ethel's kind thoughtfulness Agnes had been spared the necessity of appearing at the breakfast, it having been arranged that the bride and bridegroom should only return to Roseneath for Grace to change her dress for her tour to the Lakes, which were then in their richest beauty. This tour was just what they could both thoroughly enjoy as lovers of nature—and of each other.

There were never a husband and wife whose characters were so diametrically opposed to each other, and whose tastes so perfectly agreed. This difference of character and similarity of tastes is one of the surest presages of happiness in married life, in which two persons hitherto almost strangers are thrown so much on each other for companionship.

After their departure Agnes wandered about like a troubled spirit, as if she were glad to be set free from her self-imposed imprisonment. She had con-

fined herself to the house almost entirely, lest she might chance to encounter Mr. Percival and Grace in any of their walks. At first she felt her recovered liberty a relief; but she was not long in discovering that while she remained at Roseneath there was no hope of forgetting what she had lost. Every place, every person reminded her of Mr. Percival. Many things recalled him to her mind as her lover, and she began to fear that if she continued where all was in some way connected with him, and where she was obliged to listen to her mother's continual praises of him, she never could regain even the appearance of composure; not that she ever in the slightest degree struggled to overcome her passionate love, but she fancied a new scene might work some alteration without exertion on her part; so she determined to go to the seaside, ostensibly for change of air, but in reality to escape from her mother. The sea air particularly disagreed with Mrs. Egerton, and the doctors had forbidden her to go near it, which Agnes knew full well. It was in vain that Mrs. Egerton tried all her powers of persuasion to induce her daughter not to abide by her resolution. Her obstinacy caused much distress to her mother, who deemed one so young, so beautiful, and so inexperienced, not to say thoughtless, totally unfit to guide herself aright when alone, and unguarded, amongst strangers. Ethel fully entered into Mrs. Egerton's feelings on the occasion, although they were not explained to her, and she also endeavoured to dissuade Agnes from carrying out her plan, but all in vain. She was not a person to be influenced, because she invariably acted with a view to her own accommodation. Her aim now was to separate herself from her mother, to avoid hearing the perpetual

allusions to Grace's happiness in the prospect of passing her life with a husband in every way so well calculated to ensure it to his wife. She therefore chose to go to Aberystwith, taking with her her nurse and child, and her French waiting-maid.

Aberystwith was a fashionable watering-place; but all places were alike indifferent to Agnes, who only desired to be alone, somewhere, it mattered not where, so that she might escape not only from Mrs. Egerton, but from her own tormenting thoughts. This latter desire was not so easily accomplished, for being quite alone, she had no distractions, and instead of the self-command which she had expected to come by intuition, when she was away from Roseneath, she gave herself up completely to the indulgence of unavailing sorrow. She spent day after day listlessly sitting on the rocks, listening to the dashing of the waves, without an effort to bring her mind into a more healthy state. She appeared scarcely to remember the existence of her lovely child, who, had she kept him with her as she had been in the habit of doing at Roseneath, must in time have weaned her from her misery. With the exception of a few lines to her mother, to tell her of her safe arrival at their destination, she did not even write to any one.

How long she might have remained in this unnatural frame of spirits it is impossible to say, if she had not been awakened by a shock that made her feel the enormity of her sin. As it was her custom to go out immediately after breakfast, and not return until dinner-time, her pretty French maid had nothing to do but to dress herself and cultivate the acquaintance of all the gentlemen's *gentlemen* and ladies'-maids in the place, which she was not backward in doing.

Now these aforesaid ladies and gentlemen were going to give a picnic, and they were determined to have Mademoiselle Delphine of the party. This could have been very easily arranged, had the pretty demoiselle asked her mistress leave to go, as it was quite a matter of indifference to Agnes where her maid went or what she did; but it so happened that the nurse, who had been lately changed, and who also was young and pretty, was quite as anxious to join the fête as Mademoiselle Delphine herself, who felt assured that Mrs. Longueville would not consent to the nurse's absenting herself for any purpose of amusement, as she never now had the child with her even for an hour together.

Ways and means are always to be found, where people are set on doing what they please, whether right or wrong.

After many discussions, it was finally settled that Mademoiselle Delphine and *Miss* Jones, the nurse, should follow the party, with two of the gentlemen's gentlemen, as soon as their mistress had gone out after breakfast, and the little boy could be put to sleep, and left under the charge of an old woman, who was quite confident she could keep him quiet.

The nurse was really fond of the child, but she could not resist the temptation of the picnic, where she was to meet all her new gay acquaintances, and she flattered herself that nothing could happen to the child; nevertheless, it required all the arguments of her companions to enable her to conquer her fears so far as to induce her to abandon it.

The day was particularly lovely, and Agnes spent it as usual sitting amongst the rocks, or sauntering along the shore with a book in her hand, which she

rarely even attempted to read. About five o'clock, as she was on the point of returning, a man rushed up to her and said, in some agitation,—

"You are the lady I have been looking for, for more than an hour."

Agnes was rather startled; but as her child was never now uppermost in her thoughts, she was only alarmed lest Grace and Mr. Percival had arrived.

"What were you seeking me for?" she inquired.

The man, who was one of the waiters at the hotel at which she was staying, hesitated how to answer her, for, an hour before, he had left her child dying. At last he said,—

"Missus desired me to tell you, ma'am, she would be glad if you would come back directly, for your little boy—was not quite well."

There was something in the man's voice and manner that frightened her, and grasping his arm convulsively, she exclaimed,—

"Is he dead?"

"No, ma'am; missus only said he was ill, and she wished I could find you, ma'am, as the nurse and ma'm'selle were gone a pleasuring."

Agnes asked no more, a mingled sense of horror, and of restored love for her child gave her almost supernatural strength, as she sped along, wholly regardless of the astonished looks of those whom she encountered, and who began to suspect some mental derangement in the lovely and solitary stranger. Her youth and her striking beauty had attracted a large share of the attention of those idlers who are always to be seen lounging about during the season at a fashionable watering-place.

When she had reached the hotel, without pausing

to make a single inquiry, she pushed past all the by-standers, and at once rushed to her boy's nursery. She threw open the door, to find the room full of people, and her child lying in his little cot, as lovely in death as he had been in life. She uttered not a sound, but took the little waxen image in her arms, and sat down as if to lull him to sleep.

The doctor was in the room, having been sent for by the landlady as soon as she became aware of the little Gerald's condition.

He immediately ordered every one out, and desired that the woman who had had the care of the child should be strictly guarded. He said this in a low voice; but it was quite the same to Agnes, who was perfectly insensible to all that was going on around her.

As soon as the room was cleared, he went up to her and said,—

"I am a physician, and I wish to assure you that everything has been done for your child that it was possible to do."

"He is not dead, my angel child?" asked she, looking wildly at the doctor.

He was a man of feeling, and acutely he felt for the beautiful young mother; but as there was no hope, he thought it better at once to convince her, if possible, of the real state of the case, so he answered, softly,—

"You will go to him, but he will not return to you."

The words of Scripture were perhaps the best that could have been used to recall Agnes to her right mind; she looked at the doctor again, but with a softened expression, which, as a medical man, he caught at once. He answered the look by saying,—

"It is a hard trial to flesh and blood, but it is a privilege, and not a judgment, to be the mother of a justified spirit who is now singing the praises of his Redeemer before His throne." He paused for a moment, and then continued, "A mother would not recall her baby from such bliss even if she could."

"You are right," said she, with a marble calmness that was almost too much for the good physician. "But I have killed my boy by my own neglect." She gazed at the child, and then suddenly turning to the doctor, she exclaimed, quite wildly, "Why did he die? Did I not kill him?"

"Certainly not," he replied, with a forced calmness; "he died of convulsions, a very common disease with children.

The baby dropped from her arms, and she herself fell into strong convulsions.

The doctor was not sorry, as her helplessness enabled him to have her immediately put to bed, where, after strong remedies, she recovered her consciousness. But the doctor was so much afraid of her excitable temperament, that, though he had sent instantly for a nurse to whom he could safely commit her, he did not leave her all night.

She neither lost her senses nor became feverish; but her strength appeared to have left her completely, as well as all power of thought, and she lay perfectly still. She breathed, but that was the only sign of life she gave.

While she was in this state there was an inquest on the body of the child, at which the doctor said that Mrs. Longueville was not in a fit condition to give evidence, and it was the less necessary, as the woman who had had the charge of the baby confessed that

she had given him drops, bought at the apothecary's shop, as she was afraid he would have been sick, he cried so much when he found himself with strangers. She declared that she had often given children the same dose, and that it had never done them any harm. It proved, however, that there had been a mistake in the mixing of the drops, and that they were much more potent than they ought to have been. Altogether, it was a clear case of neglect, though their was no proof that any one had sought to injure the child.

CHAPTER XXV.

ALTHOUGH Ethel is an especial favourite, we do not feel at all inclined to give an elaborate description of her wedding. She shared Grace's dislike to a public marriage; but she had not the same power to prevent it, as Lady Augusta was essentially fond of ostentation, and had quite determined to carry her point.

There were two things, however, that Monmouth was quite as determined upon. The first was that she should be married by his friend Percival, instead of the bishop of the diocess; and the other, that what ought to be the happiest day of his life should be so, as far as possible, and that he would carry off his bride after the ceremony, and leave Lady Augusta the entertainment of the party she would collect around her. In both these designs he was seconded by Ethel.

Agnes's protracted silence had caused Ethel and Grace very great uneasiness, particularly Grace, who urged Mr. Percival to go to Aberystwith to discover if there were any adequate reason for the cessation of her letters for such a length of time. He tried to soothe her by some excuse for not undertaking her mission, as in their relative positions it was quite impossible that he could.

Her silence had not so much effect on Mrs. Egerton, who, though uneasy, or rather anxious for intelligence, was less excited by it, as Agnes had told her it made

her head ache to write, and that she must not expect to hear from her more than once. Agnes had written that once, and she never troubled herself to reply to the continued kind letters she received from Grace, and also from Ethel, who, in all her own multifarious concerns and happy hours, contrived to find time to write to Agnes, in the hope of raising her spirits.

Ethel and Monmouth were scarcely more together than they had often been in their lives before; but their was no drawback to their present enjoyment, as they had entire confidence in each other. One evening they were sitting together almost in the twilight. They had not spoken for some time. It was a very pleasant silence, quite as eloquent as words. But pleasant though it was, it could not last long. It was first broken by Monmouth, who said,—

"Ethel, is there any particular place you would like to go to next week?"

"Next week!"—and then with a blush and a smile replied, "I have a wish, but I am afraid you will think me very fanciful. I should like to go through a part of North Wales."

"And look up Agnes? Have I guessed rightly?" asked he, bending over her.

One bright glance was his reward, as she said,—

"And will you come?"

"Certainly, dearest, if it would give you the slightest pleasure; but I much fear you are thinking more of her than she deserves, or than she would be thankful for."

"I feel sure there is more in Agnes than appears on the surface. I mean more feeling, and even if it were not so, we may be of use to her."

That little word *we* has a marvellous effect on

lovers, and there was nothing it could not gain from Monmouth, even if he had not been ready to comply with every fancy of Ethel's. He said,—

"You are right, dearest Ethel, as you always are. We should not throw from us any opportunity of doing good; and it has more than once struck me that Agnes has had some weight on her mind lately, though what it is I cannot conjecture."

"All the more reason," was the answer, "that she should not be left to brood over it alone. I am so glad you do not call my wish a foolish one."

The reply to this, being a lover's speech, may be imagined by any one according to his own peculiar fancy in such matters.

The wedding went off with great *éclat*, according to Lady Augusta's statement to one of her correspondents, whose gossiping propensities she was in the habit of making use of whenever she desired to let any of her private affairs become public property. She did not say,—because she knew nothing about it, but it was nevertheless the truth,—that the two happiest persons of the party were the bride and bridegroom.

Ethel had not the drawback of a parting from any one she loved. Even Dunmere Abbey, had she cared for it, might be as much a home to her, if she pleased, after her marriage as before. She had no one with whom to divide her heart, and it was given unreservedly to Monmouth. On his part he could not recollect the time that she had not been his first, almost his only thought. His mother had never tried to win his young attachment, and he had never had a sister.

CHAPTER XXVI.

About a fortnight after their marriage Mr. and Mrs. Monmouth Longueville arrived at Aberystwith, but Agnes had left the day before for Roseneath. When she had first been ill, the doctor had been most anxious that her friends should be written for; but she would not hear of it. She was in that morbid state of mind that she would rather die alone than tell the tale of her misery and her errors.

The nurse who had been chosen for her attendant was a most excellent Christian woman. Her original station in life had been higher than the one she now occupied; but this did not tend to make her discontented with her present calling; on the contrary, she was more kind and devoted to her charges than is sometimes the case with the ordinary hired nurses. A class, however, which is yearly improving under the better system of training now in force. In this instance Mrs. Henley tended Agnes with unceasing and almost motherly care. Her great anxiety was to bring about, if possible, some change in her patient's state of mind; but as she found all her attempts repulsed, not with rudeness, but with apathy, she felt only the more incited to pray for a strength not her own, to effect what she knew that no human power alone could ever achieve. Her gentle sweetness won at last upon Agnes, so far as to induce her

to give, at least, the semblance of attention to her. One sleepless night Mrs. Henley asked Mrs. Longueville to allow her to read to her, and thus endeavour to lull her into slumber. Her answer was,—

"I have not any books here I could bear to listen to," her fastidiousness inclining her to imagine that a nurse-tender could not read sufficiently well. Mrs. Henley was too much in earnest to be put off with anything short of a refusal; so she quietly took from her pocket a small book, such as Agnes would scarcely have chosen, "Eternity Realized." It is most powerfully written, and though Agnes had often before heard the truths it contained, yet never had she been so prepared to receive them. The blow required to break this flinty heart had been struck at last. Mrs. Henley was an excellent reader, and her soul was uplifted in supplication while she read, that the words might be brought home by the Spirit to the heart of her listener. The prayer of faith was heard, for Agnes burst into tears, the first she had shed since the loss of her child, and holding out her hand to Mrs. Henley, she said,—

"Pray for me."

Her companion did not require a second request, but sank on her knees by the bedside, and poured forth her heart in such prayers as the real Christian alone can pray.

Agnes was very much agitated, but her nurse knew that, even for her bodily health, those tears would be salutary, while she felt how inestimable would that agitation be if it really proved the means of rousing her to think of her immortal soul. When the prayer was finished Agnes gently thanked Mrs. Henley, and begged of her to go to bed. She wished once more to

be alone—to be still—but that was not so easy; she had been aroused to a consciousness of sin, which she had never before experienced. It was not remorse, it was horror of her own sinfulness in the sight of God, and a feeling of terror lest she should die in her present condition. Agnes, from her earliest childhood, had been instructed in the Christian faith, but her heart was hardened through the deceitfulness of sin; so that her ears were full that she could not hear and understand the truth. But now that all her earthly hopes were taken from her, her heart was opened by her Heavenly Father to believe those things which belonged to her peace.

The change, though she could afterwards trace its commencement to that night, was not a sudden one. Day after day Mrs. Henley read to her from the Bible, and good books chosen for her by the rector of the parish, who, though he could not force his way into Mrs. Longueville's presence, had frequently heard of her from Mrs. Henley, who was one of his favourite parishioners, and whom he had aided by every means in his power. Her sweet voice sent home every word to Agnes's awakened heart, and she loved to hear her good nurse talk. At last the latter prevailed on her patient to admit the old clergyman, who had not ceased to call and inquire after her from Mrs. Henley.

He was deeply religious, and his sole aim in visiting Agnes was her spiritual instruction and comfort. He had no wish to intrude into her private affairs, and after his first visit she was always glad to see him; gradually, as she knew and understood him better, speaking more confidentially to him, though she could not tell him her reasons for leaving home. Mind and body were both relieved by this confidence, limited as

it was. The idea of home was still distasteful to Agnes; but her newly-acquired opinions on the subject of duty made her realize how absolutely incumbent it was on her to write to her mother. It was some time before she could bring herself to do so; but when she did write she did not spare herself. Notwithstanding the loss of the little boy, Mrs. Egerton could not but rejoice at Agnes's letter, for she felt that though she had lost her grandchild, she had recovered her own wanderer, the child of her prayers and anxious fears.

Agnes wrote also to Grace, who no longer found any difficulty in prevailing on Mr. Percival to take her to her sister and bring her home. They all remained some days at Aberystwith, and then returned together to Roseneath.

Agnes's conversion was not a miracle, and her natural character—so to speak—was not one easily to form a Christian. She had much, very much to contend against, and many were the struggles before those uncontrolled passions would be brought into subjection; but still there were periods of happiness greater than she had ever known, and, with the exception of a natural heart-yearning after her lovely baby, she did not wish for any alteration in her lot. She joined hand and heart with Grace in the care of the poor, and became a blessing to all around her.

When Ethel returned she also partook of the general feeling of comfort that Agnes shed around her. The change in her was the work of the Spirit of God, therefore it was lasting. Ambition, her besetting sin, might have been still her chief temptation had her child been spared to her. Once, while speaking of him to Ethel, she had expressed her consciousness of

this danger, which she had escaped at the cost of such bitter suffering.

One of the best proofs given by Agnes of the real improvement and elevation in her character was her altered behaviour to her mother-in-law, whom she treated with kindly attention and respect. Lady Augusta, on her side, having always had a wholesome fear of her daughter-in-law, did not attempt to presume too far in return.

It is almost needless to say that Mademoiselle Delphine was sent home to her own country. Mr. Montgomery, the venerable clergyman of Aberystwith, was a frequent and welcome visitor at Roseneath and at the rectory.

We must now bid adieu to those with whom we have travelled thus far on the journey of life, with the wish, though scarcely the hope, that this tale may give the readers of it half as much pleasure in the perusal as it has given the author in the composition.

THE END.